The concept of evil in the fiction of G. K. Chesterton : with special reference to his use of the grotesque.

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THE CONCEPT OF EVIL IN THE FICTION OF G.K. CHESTERTON: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS USE OF THE GROTESQUE

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Abstract

G.K. Chesterton is often dismissed as a superficial optimist who failed to comprehend the painful reality of existence. Yet this perspective itself fails to appreciate the theological context within which Chesterton's optimistic outlook needs to be understood. This thesis explores the theological context underlying Chesterton's optimism, and focuses upon his concept of evil. It does so by looking at Chesterton's fiction, which offers a unique insight into his theology.

The concept of evil raises two essential and interrelated questions: What is evil? and Why does it occur? The thesis begins by addressing the first of these, and examines Chesterton's understanding of the nature of evil. In this respect, Chesterton can be located within the privative tradition. However, this raises a further question: If evil is a privation, then how should it be imagined or depicted? Chesterton engaged with this predicament through his use of the grotesque. The thesis explores the way in which he understood this technique and comments on the different uses of it to be found within his fiction.

The second question to be addressed is normally referred to as the problem of evil. Chesterton's emphasis on the centrality of free will led him to answer this problem with reference to the Free Will Defence. The extent to which this theodicy provides a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil is considered, as is the way in which Chesterton integrated it with an appeal to mystery.

Having looked at the way in which Chesterton's fiction reveals an acute theological understanding of the concept of evil, the thesis concludes by reflecting on his apparent optimism. Chesterton's optimism does not constitute an attempt to ignore the painful reality of existence. Instead, it should be seen as Chesterton's response to the evil that he found in the world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Gilbert Keith Chesterton continues to generate a wide range of response from those who read him. This is partly the result of his vast output which covers a multitude of subjects. Faced with so many opinions and ideas, most readers can find something with which they either agree or disagree. Although a variety of different themes can be found in Chesterton's writings, there is one theme in particular that permeates all of his work. Chesterton viewed 'mere existence' as a wonderful gift, and thought that we needed to rediscover the joy of being alive. In the conclusion to *Orthodoxy*, he suggested that joy, "is the gigantic secret of the Christian".[1] Elsewhere, he explained that: "This way of looking at things…[involved] a sort of mystical minimum of gratitude…"[2]

Chesterton's emphasis on the joy of existence challenges his readers to look at the world in a new way. It also threatens to ignore, or at least marginalise, the suffering that we find in the world. Thus it is hardly surprising that many people have responded to this aspect of Chesterton's writing with considerable hostility. In their minds, Chesterton is little more than a superficial optimist who failed to comprehend the painful reality of existence. As Michael Mason acknowledged: "Some critics have accused Chesterton of a truly infantile unawareness of the dark side of life."[3] Charles Frederick Gurney Masterman (1874-1927) voiced the opinion of many in his review of *The Defendant*: "Mr Chesterton is convinced that the Devil is dead. A children's epileptic hospital, a City dinner, a suburban at home, a South African charnel camp, or any other examples of cosmic ruin fail to shake this blasphemous optimism."[4] Henry Murray (1837-1915) levelled a similar criticism in his own review of Chesterton:

> The real paradox about Mr Chesterton…is that, with a tender and overflowing affection for all sentient things, he seems almost completely ignorant of the existence of sorrow or suffering…I cannot imagine that he has ever given one

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[1] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1927), p. 296.

[2] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936: repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 91.

[3] Michael Mason, *The Centre of Hilarity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1959), p. 239.

[4] C.F.G. Masterman, "The Blasphemy of Optimism", *The Speaker* 26 April 1902, p. 116.

> solitary individual a moist eye or a lump in the throat. Pathos and tragedy are notes, or rather entire octaves, lacking from his keyboard. His boisterous optimism will not admit that there is anything to sorrow over in this best of all possible worlds.[5]

In response to such criticism, various supporters have rushed to Chesterton's defence and written a number of books defending his optimistic outlook. Sister Marie Virginia's, *G.K. Chesterton's Evangel*, provides a prime example of this sort of uncritical approach. The closing pages bear more resemblance to a homily than to a critical assessment of Chesterton: "Before we turn the last pages of this book, let us pay our loving tribute to the memory of Mr Chesterton. For him, Christ's crusader and Our Lady's minstrel, we shall often pray. His lips have been hushed by the Divine Master whom he served so well with his pen, but his works will live..."[6] A similar example of uncritical devotion can be found in Patrick Braybrooke's comment: "What is Chesterton's worst book? There is but one answer. The book he has not yet written, the book he will never write."[7] The problem with many of these uncritical works is that they have had the adverse effect of confirming the belief of many, that anyone with the ability to think critically must conclude that Chesterton was ignorant of the reality of evil.

One of the reasons that people often react with such hostility to Chesterton's optimism is that they fail to see it within the necessarily theological context. This results in an interpretation of the word optimism that is quite different from Chesterton's. Charles Williams alluded to this point in his discussion of Chesterton's poetry: "Mr Chesterton has been called an optimist and a medievalist and many other things. But it is because the things for which he has fought, carelessly considered, have a certain superficial resemblance to what is usually meant by those carelessly employed terms."[8]

The intention of my thesis is to examine the theological context within which Chesterton's optimistic outlook should be understood, and the focal point of this

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[5] Henry Murray, "Gilbert Keith Chesterton" *The Bookman* May 1910, pp. 64-5.

[6] Sister Marie Virginia, *G.K. Chesterton's Evangel* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1937), p. 239.

[7] Patrick Braybrooke, *The Wisdom of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1929), p. 240.

[8] Charles Williams, *Poetry at Present* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 112.

discussion will be Chesterton's concept of evil. Although Chesterton is universally recognised as a theological writer,[9] there is a noticeable lack of theological writing on him. Many of the books on Chesterton only mention his theology in passing, preferring to focus upon his general thoughts and ideas. Of course, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such approaches: books such as Thomas Peters', *Battling for the Modern Mind: A Beginner's Chesterton* (1994) for example, offer a useful introduction to Chesterton's thought; but these general approaches often lack detail, and can quickly become repetitive. Chesterton's theology needs to be explored in much greater detail if we are to penetrate the mind of Chesterton and seek a proper understanding of his deepest concerns.

Despite the apparent shortage of theological interest in Chesterton, some useful work has been done in this regard. A number of short, interesting articles can be found in journals such as *The Chesterton Review*. Longer works include the book by Quentin Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher without Portfolio* (1988), which provides the reader with an interesting analysis of Chesterton's philosophy. The only criticism of Lauer's otherwise excellent book is that it remains too wide-ranging. Hugh Kenner offers a helpful analysis of the theological dimension of Chesterton's paradoxes in *Paradox in Chesterton*,[10] while Thomas N. Hart's unpublished PhD dissertation, *G.K. Chesterton's Case for Christianity* (1974), looks in considerable detail at various aspects of Chesterton's *apologia* for the Christian faith. Of less value is the book by K. Dwarakanath, *G.K. Chesterton: A Critical Study* (1986). This book addresses a number of theological themes within Chesterton's writings, but the quality of the theological discussion is poor: superficial in its understanding of the issues involved, and heavily dependent on unsubstantiated generalisations.

In view of the paucity of work dealing with Chesterton's theology, it is hardly surprising that his understanding of evil is an area that has been left relatively untouched. At the same time, various critics have acknowledged the importance of this theme within Chesterton's work. In an extended introduction (96 pages) to his

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[9] Whether or not Chesterton is primarily a theologian, rather than a journalist or writer, is irrelevant to the point that I am making here. I simply mean that his writings contain a great deal of theology.

[10] Also see Yves Denis, *G.K. Chesterton: Paradoxe et Catholicisme* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978).

collection of Chesterton's writings, *Prophet of Orthodoxy: The Wisdom of G.K. Chesterton* (1997), Russell Sparkes entitles one section, "The Problem of Evil". Unfortunately, this amounts to little more than a few scattered thoughts on Chesterton's interest in the *Book of Job*. Emile Cammaerts is equally brief when he devotes three pages of *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues and G.K. Chesterton* (1937), to Chesterton's understanding of good and evil.[11] A more promising analysis of Chesterton and evil can be found in Christopher Hollis' work, *The Mind of Chesterton* (1970). Hollis recognises the centrality of evil to much of Chesterton's thought, yet because he is more concerned with writing an intellectual biography than a theological treatise, many of the issues that he alludes to are not explored in further detail. In a similar vein is the work by Gary Wills, *Chesterton: Man & Mask* (1961). This excellent literary appreciation of Chesterton explores the dark side to his writings, but lacks any theological depth. Michael Mason touches upon certain theological issues related to evil in his book, *The Centre of Hilarity* (1960), which examines the function of laughter in both Chesterton and T.S. Eliot. In my concluding chapter, I will discuss the relevant sections of this book in further detail.

The connection between Chesterton and evil is commented upon more briefly elsewhere. All of Chesterton's biographers highlight the encounter with evil that he had during his time at the Slade School of Art. In addition, numerous critical writings that deal with specific works, such as the Father Brown stories, include references to evil. (These will be discussed further in the relevant chapters of my thesis.) One of the earliest books on Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism* (1908), written by his brother Cecil and published anonymously, illustrates both of these approaches. It discusses Chesterton's growing awareness of the reality of evil as a young man, as well as the significance of this theme in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908).

Perhaps the most sustained discussion of Chesterton's concept of evil can be found in the unpublished PhD thesis by Gillian Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents* (The University of Sussex, 1973). Cross' thesis considers Chesterton's emphasis on reality as a response to the Decadents. Chapter Five is entitled: "Spiritual Reality: (i) Good

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[11] Emile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues and G.K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1937), pp. 20-3.

and Evil". Cross distinguishes between Chesterton's early treatment of evil as an external force, and his later emphasis on sin (after 1914). Although her chapter is quite incisive, it seems to me that her understanding and use of the first of these two categories is confused. Discussing Chesterton's early work, she writes: "...by externalising all the dark and terrifying aspects of evil, he tends to minimize the full force of the doctrine of the Fall which implies, among other things, that one must confront evil and terror within one's own soul."[12] Yet this is not necessarily the case. Cross offers no reason as to why an externalised evil cannot be responsible for the sin that is found "within one's own soul". Cross seems to confuse the question of what evil is, with the question of why we commit evil. Admittedly, Cross is not writing a theological work, but the subject of evil cannot be successfully understood outside of its theological context. A further problem concerns her use of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* as evidence of Chesterton's early tendency to, "treat evil largely as a force external to man."[13] This novel (which I discuss in chapter six and chapter eight) stems from the solipsism that Chesterton struggled with as a young man. Hence, as I hope to demonstrate, it is more accurate to describe the evil within the novel as internal rather than external.

A Biographical Sketch

Before going on to examine Chesterton's concept of evil, it is useful to recall briefly some of the salient details surrounding his life and writings. If nothing else, this will have the effect of reminding us that Chesterton personally experienced a degree of suffering and evil during his life. (For a more detailed look at Chesterton's life, the

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[12] Gillian Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Sussex University, 1973), p. 108.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

reader is referred to Chesterton's *Autobiography*, as well as the many biographies that have been written about him.[14])

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born in 1874. His childhood was not particularly dramatic, although his eight year old sister, Beatrice, died when he was only three years old.[15] In January 1887, he made the move from Colet Court preparatory school to St Paul's public school, where he stayed as a day boarder until 1892. He acquired a reputation at school as being something of an oddity, which was partly caused by his ungainly appearance. It was some time before Chesterton's potential was recognised, and much of his time was spent daydreaming at the back of the class, and doodling in his notebooks. He also read widely from his earliest years. While he was at St Pauls, Chesterton formed a close friendship with Edmund Clerihew Bentley, and became involved with a group of other boys who discussed literature together and called themselves the J.D.C. (Junior Debating Club).

In 1893, Chesterton began to attend the Slade School of Art, which was linked to University College London, and registered for courses in Art, Latin, French, and English Literature.[16] John Coates tells us that: "His time there, the unhappiest and most troubled in his life, was of great significance in the development of his thought. A number of experiences, both intellectual and emotional convinced him of the reality of evil."[17] It was an introspective period for Chesterton, during which he wrestled with feelings of isolation and solipsism. This was partly explained by the departure of his closest friends from St Paul's to Oxford University. Another factor was the Impressionism that he encountered at Slade. The significant effect that this had upon Chesterton is something that I will examine in more detail in chapter six. By the time

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[14] See Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (1944); Dudley Barker, *G.K. Chesterton* (1974); Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (1982); Michael Ffinch, *G.K. Chesterton: A Biography* (1986); Michael Coren, *Gilbert: The Man who was G.K. Chesterton* (1989); and Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (1996).

[15] Chesterton's family struggled to come to terms with their grief. After the death, Chesterton's father refused either to look at photographs of his daughter, or to hear her name being spoken.

[16] Amid some confusion among Chesterton's biographers, Denis Conlon has argued that Chesterton actually registered for a course as a book illustrator at UCL. See Denis Conlon, "A Book Review of *Prophet of Orthodoxy*", *The G.K. Chesterton Quarterly* No. 6 (Spring 1998), p. 14.

[17] John Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984), pp. 5-6.

that Chesterton left Slade in 1895,[18] he had emerged from his dark and morbid period with a new sense of hope:

> In truth, the story of what was called my Optimism was rather odd. When I had been for some time in these, the darkest depths of the contemporary pessimism. I had a strong inward impulse to revolt; to dislodge this incubus or throw off this nightmare. But as I was still thinking the thing out by myself, with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift mystical theory of my own. It was substantially this: that even mere existence, reduced to its most primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting.[19]

Upon leaving Slade, Chesterton decided to pursue a literary career, and spent the next six years in publishing. His first job was at a small publishers called Redways. He soon left Redways for Fisher Unwin, where he worked as an illustrator and reader until 1901. In 1896 he met Frances Blogg, the secretary of a debating club that met in Bedford Park, and he subsequently married her in 1901.

In 1900, Chesterton published two collections of poetry, *Greybeards at Play* and *The Wild Knight*. In the years that followed, he combined his writing with a career in journalism. As we have already noted, Chesterton's output was prolific, and a number of his writings might be considered significant.[20]

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[18] Although Chesterton did not take his degree at UCL, he did complete his course of studies there. Denis Conlon notes that this was "common practice except for those destined for Teaching, the Civil Service or the Church". Conlon, "A Book Review of *Prophet of Orthodoxy*", *The G.K. Chesterton Quarterly*, p. 14.

[19] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 91

[20] Listed below are the publications that I consider to be Chesterton's most significant in this context. The list also includes certain works that are significant only in terms of my thesis: *The Defendant* (1901); *Robert Browning* (1903); *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904); *The Club of Queer Trades* (1905); *Heretics* (1905); *Charles Dickens* (1906); "Introduction" to *The Book of Job* (1907); *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908); *Orthodoxy* (1908); *The Ball and the Cross* (1910; but first serialised in 1905-6); *What's Wrong with the World* (1910); *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911); *The Ballad of the White Horse* (1911); *Manalive* (1912); *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913); *Magic* (1913); *The Flying Inn* (1914); *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914); *The Man who Knew Too Much* (1922); *Tales of the Long Bow* (1925); *The Everlasting Man* (1925); *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926); *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (1927); *The Return of Don Quixote* (1927; but first serialised in 1925-6); *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927); *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929); *The Thing* (1929); *Four Faultless Felons* (1930); *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933); *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935); *Autobiography* (1936); *The Paradoxes of Mr Pond* (1937); *The Coloured Lands* (1938); *The Surprise* (1952).

Chesterton's fictional output began to tail off after 1914. In many respects, this marked a turning point for Chesterton. At the end of 1914 he fell seriously ill and slipped into a coma for several months. When he recovered, he took over the editorship of the *New Witness* (formerly *The Eye-Witness*) from his brother Cecil, who was fighting in the First World War. Cecil's death in 1918 had a devastating effect on Gilbert, who subsequently felt obliged to take over the editorship of the *New Witness* on a permanent basis. In 1925, this weekly journal was renamed *G.K.'s Weekly*. Editing this journal required much of Chesterton's time and energy, as well as his financial support. It led to a changing emphasis in Chesterton's interests, from the literary, to the socio-economic and political.[21]

Chesterton was finally received into the Catholic Church in 1922. There was a certain inevitability about this decision, and it did not involve a significant change in his thinking. In many ways, the church into which he was received was not noticeably different from the Anglo-Catholic tradition from which he had come. Furthermore, a clear statement of Chesterton's Christian belief had been visible back in 1908 when he published *Orthodoxy*. In the introductory chapter he explained: "These essays are concerned only to discuss the actual fact that the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) is the best root of energy and sound ethics."[22] While Chesterton's faith can be traced back to an early point in his career, his interest in religious matters continued to increase as his life unfolded. Many of the most significant books he wrote during his later years were overtly religious, including: *The Everlasting Man*, *The Thing*, and *St Thomas Aquinas*. Chesterton died at his home in Beaconsfield in 1936.

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[21] I do not mean to suggest that Chesterton lost interest in literature, but rather that his interest decreased as other interests grew. Chesterton wrote a number of works of fiction after 1914, including many of the Father Brown stories. He also published a study of Robert Louis Stevenson in 1927, and a study of Chaucer in 1932.

[22] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 18.

Outline Of The Thesis

In the chapters that follow, I will look at Chesterton's concept of evil by locating it within a specifically theological context. This will involve looking at the work of many writers with whom Chesterton is not typically associated. For example, in chapters seven and eight, I will draw on the work of a number of contemporary philosophers of religion who have written on the problem of evil. This is a deliberate attempt on my part to try and locate Chesterton within the academic mainstream. It is virtually impossible to assess Chesterton's concept of evil if we do not relate it to the extensive work that already exists on evil in general

The large amount of material that could be included in any study of Chesterton and evil means that a number of things have to be left out. It is not my intention simply to catalogue every example of evil in Chesterton's writings. Such an approach would not be the most effective way of understanding Chesterton's thought on the subject. One area that I will not cover in detail concerns the evils that Chesterton identified within his society. Books such as *Heretics* (1905) and *What's Wrong With the World* (1910) are particularly concerned with addressing these social and political evils, although similar themes recur throughout the rest of Chesterton's work. There are two reasons for avoiding this approach. The first is that various books already exist which discuss some of the social evils that Chesterton was trying to explore. These include Ian Boyd's, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton: A Study in Art and Propaganda* (1975) which focuses upon Chesterton's socio-economic and political views; and John Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (1984) which looks at the intellectual milieu of the period. The second reason is that the term 'evil' is primarily a theological concept and can quickly become too broad when interpreted in this manner.

As the title of this thesis suggests, I plan to examine Chesterton's concept of evil by looking at his fiction. This raises a wide range of questions about the relationship between religion and literature. I will address some of these in chapter two, where I intend to explain my reasons for adopting this methodological approach.

The concept of evil raises two essential and interrelated questions: What is evil? and Why does it occur? Obviously there are a number of other questions that we might

consider, but these two seem to cover most of the issues that we might wish to think about. Thus chapter three examines the first of these two questions, and explores the theological predicament of how evil can be defined and understood. This has been a source of constant difficulty for Christian theologians over the years. In responding to this question, we can locate Chesterton within a particular theological tradition. Chesterton's understanding of the nature of evil raises a further question as to how evil should be represented in literary form. This becomes the subject of chapters four, five, and six, which look at Chesterton's use of the grotesque as a literary device by which evil can be portrayed.

Although interest in the grotesque has increased in recent years, it remains a notoriously difficult subject to define. My own understanding of the grotesque as a technique for representing evil, is not the only position that is held. For example, Rudolf Matthias Fabritius in his book, *Das Komische im Erzählwerk G.K. Chestertons* (1964), describes Chesterton's use of the comic in terms of the grotesque. There is clearly a considerable diversity among critics as to how the grotesque should be understood. Therefore, chapter four will begin by surveying the theoretical work on the subject, before going on to explore Chesterton's own understanding of it. Chapters five and six will then focus on the different ways in which Chesterton used the grotesque to represent evil in his fiction.

In chapter seven I move on to consider the second of our two questions concerning evil: Why does it occur? This question is usually described as the problem of evil. The problem of evil challenges every religious and philosophical system because of the way in which suffering is such an integral part of our human experience. The theologian Hans Kung explains: "It is a history in which all identity, significance and value of reality and human existence seem to be constantly radically called into question by non-identity, pointlessness and worthlessness."[23] Kung goes on to describe the problem of evil as, "the rock of atheism."[24]

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[23] Hans Kung, *On Being a Christian*, (1974; trans. Edward Quinn, London: Collins, 1978), p. 428.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 431.

Chapter seven will present various forms of the problem of evil, and the use of the Free Will Defence as a possible explanation, or 'theodicy'. The concept of free will was an important one for Chesterton, and I will analyse the way in which he used this idea to respond to the problem of evil in his writings. Although the Free Will Defence can be used to deal with some forms of the problem of evil, it leaves other questions unanswered. Human suffering provides a focal point for many of these question, as can be seen in the story of Job. Chapter eight will consider Chesterton's response to human suffering, and explore the way in which Chesterton reconciled his belief in the mystery of suffering with his attempts at providing a theodicy.

By examining Chesterton's response to questions regarding the nature of evil and why it occurs, we shall be in a position to understand his concept of evil. I want to suggest that this theological context is a necessary foundation for anyone who wishes to make sense of his optimistic outlook. His particular philosophy of life must not be seen as an attempt to hide from the reality of evil. Instead, having understood the reality of evil, Chesterton sought to respond to it by viewing it within the wider theological context of existence. This is the subject of my concluding chapter, in which I take a fresh look at Chesterton's optimism. My contention is that we can only really appreciate Chesterton's optimism when we begin to understand his concept of evil. Chesterton suggests as much when he explains: "Perhaps, when I eventually emerged as a sort of theorist, and was described as an Optimist, it was because I was one of the few people in that world of diabolism who really believed in devils."[25]

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[25] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 91.

Chapter 2: Religion and Literature

Historically, the relationship between religion and literature has been an uncertain one. This can be traced back to the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle concerning the function and value of literature. Plato wanted to ban poets from his Republic because of their destabilising influence,[1] while Aristotle praised poetry for its instructive value.[2] The ensuing debate has invoked a range of responses from theologians, some of which have been hostile: "Much theology, for example, tends towards unity and coherence, a systematic exploration of the content of faith which attempts to impose limits on the meaning of words, while literature, as Ezra Pound insisted, is often dangerous, subversive and chaotic, an anarchic celebration of the creative possibilities of language."[3]

Despite the suspicion of many theologians, literature has played a central role in the theological tradition: "There is a way to do theology, a way that runs from the gospels and Paul through Augustine and Luther to Teilhard and the Berrigans, that one could call intermediary or parabolic theology, theology which relies on various literary forms – parables, stories, poems, confessions – as a way from religious experience to systematic theology."[4] Literary influences on theology can be found as early as Augustine, whose autobiographical *Confessions* owe a great deal to his classical upbringing. Since that time, literature has helped to shape a great deal of western theology.[5] For example, the popular perception of heaven and hell owes much to

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[1] "So if we are visited in our state by someone who has the skill to transform himself into all sorts of characters and represent all sorts of things, and he wants to show off himself and his poems to us, we shall treat him with all the reverence due to a priest and giver of rare pleasure, but shall tell him that he and his kind have no place in our city..." Plato, *The Republic* (Trans. Desmond Lee, London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 157.

[2] In part four of the *Poetics*, Aristotle argues that poetry imitates life, and thus helps people to learn.

[3] T.R. Wright, *Theology and Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 1.

[4] Sallie McFague TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1975), p. 2.

[5] There are many other examples – aside from the ones that follow – of writers that have contributed to theological thought. Some of these are discussed by Colin Manlove in his book, *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Of particular interest in relation to this thesis, are writers that have discussed the concept of evil in their fiction. Brian Horne looks at a number of these in his book, *Imagining Evil* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996).

Dante's, *The Divine Comedy*, while Milton's *Paradise Lost* has had a similar impact on the way in which we understand the Fall.

The interplay between literature and theology continued during the Romantic period. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), often described as the father of modern theology, can be linked with the English Romantics: "Schleiermacher formulated his hermeneutical perspective at the same time that the Romantic movement was establishing itself in English literature, and the parallels between the German theologian and the English poets are striking."[6] Among the English Romantics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is particularly important because of the way in which he encouraged theologians to acknowledge the role of the imagination as an aid to religious truth: "Coleridge was, perhaps, unique in being *both* a major artist and a major religious thinker, and this was for him the shaping tension of his whole career."[7] Much of the literature of the nineteenth century dealt with religious matters in some form or other.[8] Authors such as Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) and George Eliot (1819-1880), expressed the religious doubt and scepticism that emerged in the aftermath of German Higher Criticism and Darwinism. Other writers, such as Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81), included a great deal of theological reflection within their novels. Although many Victorian authors did not consider themselves to be religious writers, they were nearly all concerned with religion to some degree. Robert Wolff reminds us of the centrality of religion to the literature of the period: "Moreover, almost all Victorian novels – even those dealing

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[6] Roger Lundin, "Hermeneutics" in Clarence Walhout & Leland Ryken, ed., *Contemporary Literary Theory: A Christian Appraisal* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 154. For a more detailed analysis of the connection between Schleiermacher and the English Romantics, see David Jasper, ed., *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986).

[7] Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 27. In addition, see J. Robert Barth, S.J., "Theological Implications of Coleridge's Theory of Imagination" in Christine Gallant, ed., *Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today* (New York: AMS Press, 1989).

[8] The wide-ranging literary response to religion that characterised the nineteenth century is discussed by Elizabeth Jay in her book, *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1986). She divides her work into five chapters: 1. The Evangelicals, 2. The Oxford Movement and the Catholic Tradition, 3. The Broad Church, 4. Dissent, and 5. Doubt.

primarily with far different subjects – touch upon religious matters."[9] In the twentieth century, the group of Christian authors known as the Inklings, helped to shape our understanding of the way in which myth and allegory relate to the Christian faith.[10]

In recent years, literary approaches to theology have become increasingly popular with the emergence of narrative theology. The origin of narrative theology is usually linked to the publication of Hans Frei's, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (1974), although as Brian Horne has noted, it is more accurate to say that narrative theology arose out of a common interest in the link between theology and literature: "It began to emerge with the publication, mainly in the United States of America, of a number of books and articles in the 1970's asking similar questions and finding similar answers."[11]

In *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics*, Frei argued that as a result of the Enlightenment, "neither religious apologists nor historical critics were finally able to take proper and serious account of the narrative feature of the biblical stories."[12] This was because eighteenth-century theology had separated the narrative dimension of Scripture from the question of historicity. The Bible was *either* narrative, *or* it is was historically accurate, but it could not be both: "Frei's thesis is that the realistic and figural interpretations of the biblical stories, which at one time had been natural allies, began to break down under the

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[9] Robert Lee Wolff, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (London: John Murray Ltd, 1977), p. 3. A good illustration of this can be found in the novels of Charles Dickens. Dickens did not write religious novels, but the reader constantly encounters religious themes and characters in these novels. See Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1981).

[10] The Inklings are the subject of the journal, *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review*, which also looks at some of the other figures typically associated with this group. (The seven people looked at by this journal are: George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, Dorothy Sayers and Owen Barfield.) Books dealing with the literary-theological contribution of the Inklings include: John Warwick Montgomery, ed., *Myth Allegory and Gospel* (Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), and Gunnar Urang, *Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Fiction of C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and J.R.R. Tolkien* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1971).

[11] Brian Horne, "Theology in the Narrative Mode" in Peter Byrne & Leslie Houlden, ed., *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 965. A number of journals have emerged since the 1970's which reflect this interest in the relationship between religion and literature. These include: *Christianity and Literature*, *Literature and Theology*, and *Religion and Literature*.

[12] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 136.

pressures of an increasing preoccupation with questions of historicity."[13] In the late twentieth century, hermeneutics has become increasingly central to both theology and literary theory, as both disciplines have struggled to understand the meaning of the text. Indeed, as David Jasper points out, "much twentieth-century literary theory seems to take its origins from a theological anxiety [dating back to the nineteenth century]."[14]

The current popularity of interdisciplinary approaches to theology and literature does not justify the methodology of my thesis in itself. Chesterton wrote a large number of non-fictional works, ranging from journalistic articles, to propagandist war tracts. His output also included a number of theological works,[15] and this might seem a more obvious place to begin my thesis. Yet in spite of the obvious value of such writings for understanding Chesterton's concept of evil, I want to suggest that his fiction offers us a unique insight into his theology. Stephen Prickett has suggested that George MacDonald influenced Chesterton in this respect: "MacDonald, I believe, showed Chesterton that imaginative literature need not merely illustrate theological insights, but could *create* new ones. He demonstrated that theology was of its nature a fundamentally poetic and mythopoeic activity, and that the growing divorce between theology and literature…was, in the long run, as damaging to literature as it was to theology."[16]

In discussing Chesterton's novels, Ian Boyd tells us that, "they are also the products of Chesterton's powerful allegorical imagination through which he sought to teach and to persuade by means of parable and allegory rather than by discursive reason."[17] This

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[13] James Fodor, *Christian Hermeneutics: Paul Ricoeur and the Refiguring of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 262.

[14] David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion: An Introduction*, 2nd ed.(London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), p. 2. As I have already pointed out, the theological anxiety of the nineteenth century resulted from the intellectual challenge to Christianity that came from German Higher Criticism and Darwinism.

[15] Chesterton's explicitly theological works include *Orthodoxy* (1908); *The Everlasting Man* (1925); *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (1927); *The Thing* (1929); *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933); and *The Well and the Shallows* (1935).

[16] Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion*, p. 230. The influence of George MacDonald on Chesterton is examined further by Leo Heltzer in his article, "G.K. Chesterton and the Myth-Making Power", *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* Vol. 3 (1982).

[17] Ian Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton: A Study in Art and Propaganda* (London: Elek Books Limited, 1975), p. xi.

chapter will explore the way in which Chesterton understood and used fiction. in an attempt to elucidate the methodological approach that I am adopting.

Chesterton's View On The Function Of Literature

In his first major study on Charles Dickens, Chesterton noted two schools of literary thought that had emerged in the aftermath of Dickens.[18] The realists insisted that literature should be 'like life'. In reaction to the realists, there were those who adopted symbolism: "Men saw that it was necessary to give a much deeper and more delicate meaning to the expression 'like life'. Streets are not life, cities and civilizations are not life, faces even voices are not life itself. Life is within, and no man hath seen it at any time."[19] The argument between these two schools was wrapped up in the struggle between reason and the imagination that had dominated much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[20] The rise of the Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century is commonly understood as a response to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. This subsequently led to the rise of Realism, as Robert Boyer has pointed out: "Realism was a radical response, an undisguised reaction, to Romanticism…"[21] Dennis Walder tells us that realist prose fiction, "may be said to have become the dominant literary form in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century."[22] In chapter six, I will show how a growing discontent with realism was behind the rise of impressionism (and symbolism) in the later half of the nineteenth century: "If Romanticism can be seen as a reassertion of religious values in reaction to eighteenth-century rationalism, Symbolism could be

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[18] G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (1906; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1943), pp. 11-12.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[20] I am not suggesting that the ongoing tension between reason and the imagination was identical to the one existing between the realists and the symbolists, but there were certain similarities between these debates which are interesting to note.

[21] Robert D. Boyer, ed., *Realism in European Theatre and Drama 1870-1920: A Bibliography* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. xvii.

[22] Dennis Walder, ed., *The Realist Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 4. For an interesting collection of essays on nineteenth-century realism, see D.A. Williams, ed., *The Monster in the Mirror: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

called a rebellion against the limitations of nineteenth-century positivism and its denial of the realm of mystery."[23]

Chesterton was well aware of the oscillating views of literature that preceded his own period. The debate between realism and romance went back a long way: "I have known all my life what is called the conflict between romance and realism..."[24] This is a conflict that can be found throughout Chesterton's writing. Ultimately, it is never resolved; nor does he try to resolve it. As we move on to consider Chesterton's position on this matter, it is helpful to reflect upon his brother's observation that Chesterton evades easy categorisation: "But he is a peculiar and rare combination, a Romantic Idealist...From this eccentric wedding – of Idealism and Romance, is born the Chestertonian novel."[25]

Chesterton may be difficult to categorise, but it is possible to locate him within the wider literary tradition in which Samuel Johnson occupies an exemplary place. Chesterton was fascinated by Johnson to whom he often referred. Chesterton even wrote a play with him as the central figure – *The Judgement of Dr. Johnson* (1927). Denis Conlon writes: "Chesterton was a great admirer of Dr. Johnson's common sense, enjoyed impersonating him in pageants, and had an ambition to wed the republicanism of John Wilkes to the religious position of Johnson. It is hardly surprising that, when he looked around for a plot for another play, he should choose to undertake such a difficult balancing act..."[26]

Johnson argued that literature should not try to imitate life *per se*, but that it should imitate human nature.[27] This perspective challenged the fixed notions of the neo-

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[23] Wright, *Theology and Literature*, p. 149.

[24] G.K. Chesterton, "On the Truth of Legends", *All is Grist* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1931), p. 150.

[25] Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism* (London: Alston Rivers Ltd, 1908), pp. 198-9.

[26] Denis Conlon, "Chesterton: A Dramatist in Spite of Himself", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 3 No. 1 (Fall-Winter, 1976-77), p. 114. In light of Chesterton's interest in Dr. Johnson, it is interesting to read L.J. Filewood's article, "An Imaginary Conversation Between Samuel Johnson and Gilbert Chesterton", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 5 No. 1 (Fall-Winter, 1978-79).

[27] For a more detailed analysis of Johnson's view on literature and the arts, see Morris R. Brownell, *Samuel Johnson's Attitude to the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) & Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *The Uses of Johnson's Criticism* (Virginia: The University of Virginia Press, 1976).

classical critics as to what literature should be, while continuing to accept the realism of that tradition. As a result, Johnson is often seen as a transitional link between the Augustan age, and the Romantic era that was to follow. He outlined his position in a famous essay entitled, "A Preface to Shakespeare": "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life."[28] The same idea is found in *The History of Rasselas*, when Imlac describes the role of the poet: "He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind..."[29] Underpinning Johnson's view was a belief in human nature, common to all men: "but there is such an uniformity in the state of man, considered apart from adventitious and separable decorations and disguises, that there is scarce any possibility of good or ill, but is common to human kind...We are all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure."[30]

Chesterton's views on the purpose of literature were similar to Johnson's, despite the fact that the latter preceded the Romantics, while the former lived in their aftermath. In *The Victorian Age in Literature*, Chesterton defined the purpose of the novel accordingly: "I mean a fictitious narrative (almost invariably, but not necessarily, in prose) of which the essential is that the story is not told for the sake of its naked pointedness as an anecdote, or for the sake of the irrelevant landscapes and visions that can be caught up in it, but for the sake of some study of the difference between human beings."[31] He wanted fiction to represent the essence of man, rather than merely convey the details of his surroundings. In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* he comments: "...for there is one respect in which a town must be more poetical than the country, since it is closer to the spirit of man; for London, if it be not one of the masterpieces of man, is at

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[28] Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Shakespeare", reprinted in Robert Con Davis & Laurie Finke, ed., *Literary Criticism and Theory: The Greeks to the Present* (New York: Longman, 1989), pp. 407-8.

[29] Samuel Johnson, *History of Rasselas* (1759; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 62.

[30] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler No. 60* (Saturday 13th October, 1750; repr. Samuel Johnson, *Selected Writings* London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 169.

[31] G.K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; repr. London: Williams & Norgate, 1923), p. 90.

least one of his sins."[32] Chesterton thought that literature had a unique ability to represent aspects of human nature, and that this distinguished it from journalism: "Journalism only tells us what men are doing; it is fiction that tells us what they are thinking, and still more what they are feeling."[33]

Samuel Johnson had shown that Shakespeare could imitate life without keeping to the rules of classical realism. In the same way, Chesterton argued that literature could represent the essence of life without following the rules of nineteenth-century realism. He explained that art was not an exact copy of the world in which we live: "Art is a mirror not because it is the same as the object, but because it is different. A mirror selects as much as art selects; it gives the light of flames, but not their heat; the colour of flowers, but not their fragrance; the faces of women, but not their voices; the proportions of stockbrokers, but not their solidity. A mirror is a vision of things, not a working model of them."[34] Chesterton recognised that any attempt at literal realism was ultimately flawed because of the inability of fiction to capture the level of detail found in life. Lynette Hunter states that: "Chesterton bewails the fact that the novelist believed that realism was showing things 'as they are', or reproducing. The critic's [Chesterton's] own view was that a communication of essence was as fully real as the artists could be..."[35] Elsewhere, Chesterton explained: "Shakespeare's famous phrase that art should hold the mirror up to nature is always taken as wholly realistic: but it is really idealistic and symbolic..."[36]

Although Chesterton embraced Johnson's view of imitation, he combined it with a romantic streak that is not found in Johnson. Johnson was nervous of the romantics of his own and earlier ages, as can be seen in the following complaint: "Why this wild

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[32] G.K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 66.

[33] G.K. Chesterton, "The Independence of Women", *The Illustrated London News* (1923; repr. *Collected Works Volume 33: The Illustrated London News 1923-1925*, San Francisco: The Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 88.

[34] G.K. Chesterton, "History and the Theatre". *The Illustrated London News* (1910; repr. *Collected Works Volume 28: The Illustrated London News 1908-1910*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 603.

[35] Lynette Hunter, *G.K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979), p. 50.

[36] Chesterton, "History and the Theatre". *The Illustrated London News* (1910; repr. *G.K. Chesterton: The Collected Words* Vol. 28), pp. 602-3.

strain of imagination found reception so long, in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive…"[37] Chesterton did not share Johnson's inhibitions regarding a 'romantic' free use of the imagination. Instead, he cultivated his imagination and sought to live life as a romantic adventure. This is illustrated by Chesterton's decision to stop on the way from his wedding to his honeymoon to buy a revolver and some cartridges. He explained: "They seemed to me the most natural things in the world. I did not buy the pistol to murder myself or my wife…I bought it because it was the great adventure of my youth, with a general notion of protecting her from the pirates doubtless infesting the Norfolk Broads, to which we were bound…"[38] A further illustration is offered by the sword-stick that he carried with him at all times: "An essential part of Gilbert's dress was the ubiquitous sword-stick. The sword, the walking stick and the cane were to arise time and again in his writing, a symbol of romantic chivalry and pure indications of noble gestures…The stick which he carried in his early twenties was a rapier inside an elegant and sturdy outer cane."[39] Commenting on Chesterton's romantic traits, his brother Cecil wrote: "Romanticism is in Mr Chesterton's bones. It leads him not only to worship the good romantic writers – Scott and Dumas and Stevenson – but to devour even bad romantic writers, if no others are available."[40]

It is interesting to consider the allegorical dimension of Chesterton's fiction in conjunction with his mimetic views; the power of art to mirror nature.[41] Although Chesterton is not a realist in the nineteenth-century tradition, some of his critics are equally mistaken in their suggestion that his allegory hints at a Platonic ideal. Ian Boyd is guilty of this when he writes: "What Chesterton meant by allegory is never clearly

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[37] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 4 (Saturday, 31st March, 1750; repr. Victor Sage, ed., *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook* London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990), p. 31. However, Victor Sage has pointed out that despite the distrust of romanticism in Johnson's criticism, there is evidence to suggest that Johnson had a weakness for romances. See Sage's "Introduction" in *The Gothick Novel: A Casebook*, p. 10.

[38] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 33.

[39] Michael Coren, *Gilbert: The Man who was G.K. Chesterton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), p. 72.

[40] Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, p. 207. Further evidence of Chesterton's romanticism can be found in G.M. Brown, *G.K. Chesterton: an argument for his status as a serious creative writer in the mainstream of English Romanticism with a discussion of his possible influence on the novelist and poet Charles Williams* (Unpublished MPhil Thesis, Council for National Academic Awards, 1983) & William L. Isley, *The Adventure of Life: Romance in the Writing of G.K. Chesterton* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Drew University, 1986).

[41] I use the word allegorical here in its broadest sense.

expressed in his writing, but there is some evidence that he associated it with an almost platonic view of life."[42] Chesterton's allegory is not to be confused with a platonic view of life, which would assert the ultimate reality of a non-material world. It is associated with this world, which he thought provided art with all the inspiration it needed. According to Chesterton, nineteenth-century realism failed because life was too rich to be fully captured by art; not because it was not rich enough. Admittedly, Chesterton often challenged his readers to look beyond the material aspects of this world, but he was not referring to a different world when he did so: "Art indeed copies life in not copying life, for life copies nothing."[43] The allegory that permeates Chesterton's fiction is firmly rooted in the reality of this life. Hence Chesterton's observation of Adam Wayne in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*: "This one poor rhymester, having burnt his own rhymes, began to live that life of open air and acted poetry of which all the poets of the earth have dreamed in vain; the life for which the *Iliad* is only a cheap substitute."[44] The same belief underlies Chesterton's praise of the fairy tales written by Hans Christian Anderson: "Instead of teaching a child to look for magic only in imagined worlds with the assistance of charmed swords and fairy godmothers, he put it into the doll's house and toy box…"[45]

The way in which Chesterton rediscovered the wonder of existence is a theme that recurs throughout my thesis, and one that I will focus upon in the concluding chapter. It explains many of the details that we find in Chesterton's fiction. Chesterton is often at his most imaginative when he is describing (and exaggerating) something factual. The spaceship in *The Ball and the Cross* is a prime example. It appears to show Chesterton at his most fanciful, leading Ian Boyd to offer it as proof against his realism.[46] However, it is not as fanciful as it first appears. It is almost certainly based on various craft that the army balloon squadron experimented with at the time. They regularly flew them over St Paul's Cathedral, which was visible from Chesterton's office at Fisher

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[42] Ian Boyd, "Philosophy in Fiction", in John Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1974), pp. 46-7.

[43] Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, p. 12.

[44] Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, p. 70.

[45] From an early fragment by Chesterton quoted in Maisie Ward's introduction to G.K. Chesterton. *The Coloured Lands* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), p. 10.

[46] See Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton*, p. 21.

Unwin and later at the *Daily News* and the *Illustrated London News*. Other examples of realism can be found throughout the topography of Chesterton's fiction, which mirrors places with which Chesterton was familiar.[47]

Chesterton & The Moral Dimension Of Literature

Chesterton's similarity to Samuel Johnson raises the question of the relation between literature and morality. Johnson insisted that literature had a moral purpose. His fictional character, Imlac, explained: "To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination…for every idea is useful for the enforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth…"[48] Johnson did not see morality as a by-product of literature; he thought that it was its primary consideration. He believed that writers had a responsibility to write moral fiction, even if realism was sacrificed in the process:

> It is justly considered as the greatest excellency of art, to imitate nature; but it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation…
>
> …It is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears; for many characters ought never to be drawn…[49]

Although Chesterton wanted to emphasise the moral dimension of literature, he did not entirely agree with the conclusion that Johnson reached. Chesterton wrote: "Little children ought to learn nothing but legends; they are the beginnings of all sound morals and manners. I would not be severe on the point: I would not exclude a story solely because it was true. But the essential on which I should insist would be, not that the tale must be true, but that the tale must be fine."[50] Chesterton offers a refinement of Johnson's views on this subject. For example, Chesterton's attack on the pessimism of

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[47] I am indebted to Denis Conlon for pointing out these examples to me.

[48] Johnson, *History of Rasselas*, p. 61.

[49] Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler No. 4* (Saturday 31st March, 1750; repr. in Johnson, *Selected Writings)*, p. 151.

[50] G.K. Chesterton, "History and Inspiration", *The Illustrated London News* (1910; repr. *Collected Works Vol. 28*), p. 611.

contemporary writers is not an absolute statement on the moral necessity of optimistic fiction. Chesterton was simply addressing a mood that he perceived within literature as a whole:

> There is no reason, within reason, why literature should not describe the demonic as well as the divine aspect of mystery or myth. What is really remarkable is that in modern fiction, in an age accused of frivolity, in an age perhaps only too headlong in its pursuit of happiness, or at least of hedonism, the only popular sort of fantasy is the unhappy fantasy…on the whole, when the serious modern novel has dealt with the serious preternatural agency, it has not only been serious but sad. [51]

The optimism within Chesterton's own fiction is not necessarily provided at the expense of realism. He did not feel bound by Johnson's rigid concept of morality, and sought instead to write fiction that was fundamentally honest in its portrayal of life: "Telling the truth about the terrible struggle of the human soul is surely a very elementary part of the ethics of honesty. If the characters are not wicked, the book is."[52]

While Chesterton's morality was not as rigid as Johnson's, it was still central to his understanding of literature: "…I think there is in all literature a sort of purpose; quite different from the mere moralizing that is generally meant by a novel with a purpose."[53] This statement was directed at the legacy of the aesthetes, who thought that art and literature were free from all moral considerations. [54] The aesthetes argued that art could, and should, be enjoyed for its own sake. Oscar Wilde articulated this in his preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891): "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." He went on to conclude that: "All art is quite useless."[55] Chesterton rejected Wilde's belief that art and morality

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[51] G.K. Chesterton, "Magic and Fantasy in Fiction", *Sidelights on New London and Newer York* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), pp. 230-1. In chapter six, I discuss Chesterton's understanding of 'modern fiction', and Modernism in general.

[52] G.K. Chesterton, "Tom Jones and Morality", *All Things Considered* (1908; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1937), p. 266.

[53] G.K. Chesterton, "On Philosophy versus Fiction", *All is Grist*, p. 82.

[54] For a more detailed look at the role of the Aesthetes in the rise of Modernism, along with Chesterton's response to Oscar Wilde, see chapter six.

[55] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891; repr. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1992), pp. 5-6.

could be separated in this way. In an essay on Oscar Wilde, he dismissed Wilde's claims: "He sometimes pretended that art was more important than morality, but that was mere play-acting. Morality or immorality was more important than art to him and everyone else."[56] In *Heretics*, Chesterton declared that the main tenet of aestheticism was flawed, and that this could be seen in its pragmatic failure:

> In the *fin de siècle* atmosphere every one was crying out that literature should be free from all causes and all ethical creeds. Art was to produce only exquisite workmanship, and it was especially the note of those days to demand brilliant plays and brilliant short stories. And when they got them, they got them from a couple of moralists. The best short stories were written by a man trying to preach Imperialism. The best plays were written by a man trying to preach Socialism. All the art of all the artists looked tiny and tedious beside the art which was a by-product of propaganda.[57]

Chesterton declared that all great literature denied the principle of art for art's sake: "Every great literature has always been allegorical – allegorical of some view of the whole universe. The *Iliad* is only great because all life is a battle, the *Odyssey* because all life is a journey, the *Book of Job* because all life is a riddle."[58] The view of life expressed in these books is what made them so successful. It was a view of life that their authors could not help expressing. Chesterton explained that every writer had a view of the world, a *Weltanschauung*, which came out in their fiction: "We have a general view of existence, whether we like it or not; it alters, or, to speak more accurately, it creates and involves everything we say or do, whether we like it or not."[59]

Chesterton used this argument to defend the religious propaganda that critics found in his own fiction: "Personally, I am all for propaganda; and a great deal of what I write is deliberately propagandist. But even when it is not in the least propagandist, it will probably be full of the implications of my own religion; because that is what is meant by having a religion."[60] It is interesting to consider George Orwell's attack on

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[56] G.K. Chesterton, "Oscar Wilde", *A Handful of Authors: Essays on Books and Writers* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1953), p. 143.

[57] G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (1905; repr. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1928), pp. 290-1.

[58] G.K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (1901; repr. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1918), p. 68.

[59] Chesterton, *Heretics*, p. 303.

[60] G.K. Chesterton, *The Thing* (1929; repr. London: Unicorn Books, 1939), p. 113.

Chesterton in light of this. Orwell complained that: "Chesterton was a writer of considerable talent who chose to suppress his sensibilities and his intellectual honesty in the cause of Roman Catholic propaganda...Every book that he wrote, every paragraph, every sentence, had to demonstrate beyond possibility of mistake the superiority of the Catholic over the Protestant or the pagan."[61] We have already seen how Chesterton tried to put intellectual honesty before moral or didactic considerations. We might also note that Orwell is equally guilty of writing books that are overtly propagandist (e.g. *Animal Farm).* Yet Chesterton's argument goes further. Even if Orwell had not consciously tried to be propagandist in his fiction, he would have been unable to avoid expressing certain aspects of his *Weltanschauung.* Every piece of fiction informs us to some extent about the views and beliefs of its author.

The Effect Of Chesterton's Propaganda On His Fiction

Those who are suspicious of propaganda in literature have often seen in Chesterton the most blatant example of the propagandist. Chesterton was the first to admit that much of what he wrote was 'deliberately propagandist'. Cecil Chesterton voiced the concern of a number of critics when he suggested that this intentional use of propaganda tended to overshadow Chesterton's art: "His own art is certainly a by-product of propaganda."[62] Elsewhere, Cecil noted that: "...Mr Chesterton's artistic talents are simply the weapons that he uses in his war against his controversial enemies."[63] This point is confirmed by Kingsley Amis: "The Polemicist, thickly or thinly disguised, turns up virtually everywhere in Chesterton's fiction..."[64]

In his *Autobiography,* Chesterton acknowledged the problems raised by his didactic style: "In short, I could not be a novelist; because I really like to see ideas or notions

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[61] George Orwell, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Repr. In D. J. Conlon, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 102.

[62] Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, p. 223.

[63] *Ibid.*, p. xii.

[64] Kingsley Amis, "Four Fluent Fellows" in Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal*, p. 29. Along similar lines is Rev William T. Scott's observation concerning Chesterton: "He is first and foremost a propagandist." in *Chesterton and other Essays* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1912), p. 17.

wrestling naked, as it were, and not dressed up in a masquerade as men and women."[65] Chesterton's statement needs a word of qualification at this point. Chesterton is obviously exaggerating, otherwise he would not have wasted his time writing fiction. Moreover, in the context of this part of his *Autobiography*, Chesterton assumes a distinction between the novel and the short story. Much of his fiction is in the form of the short story – even his novels might be thus described when compared to the Victorian novels that preceded him. Although Chesterton believed that propaganda was a valid component of fiction, he was also aware of the distinction between literature and philosophy: "A good novelist always has a philosophy; but a good novel is never a book of philosophy."[66]

Chesterton used two particular techniques to express his propaganda. The first of these was narrative or dialogue, in which the author openly uses the movement of the story or the words of a character to voice his own opinion. This technique occurs throughout his fiction in various forms, from the poems that rail against prohibition in *The Flying Inn*, to the sermons that are such an integral part of the Father Brown stories. The explicit nature of this technique means we need not explore it in any further detail. The second, and much more complex, technique that Chesterton used was symbolism.[67]

Discussing Chesterton's use of allegory and its related forms, Lynette Hunter suggests that Chesterton's use of symbolism was inhibited by his fear of its potential subjectivity. She writes: "This type of style is one that becomes important to Chesterton when he recognises the need for fusing essence with appearance. It even becomes synonymous in his vocabulary for 'poetry'. However it is limited by its ever-present

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[65] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 298.

[66] Chesterton, "Vanity Fair", *A Handful of Authors*, p. 61.

[67] Chesterton's use of symbolism does not necessarily make him part of the symbolist school that arose in the late-nineteenth / early-twentieth century, although he was undoubtedly influenced by this school. I am simply concerned with the fact that symbols are prevalent throughout Chesterton's writings, and also with the fact that his worldview was quite symbolic. M.H. Abrams tells us that, "the term symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself." In M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed.(Florida: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1988), p. 184.

potential for becoming purely associative, random and arbitrary."[68] Although Chesterton was aware of the subjective use of symbols by many of his contemporaries, he believed that symbols could be used in an objective manner. In an article entitled "Symbolism without Meaning", Chesterton attacked the increasingly subjective use of symbolism by his contemporaries: "This, however, is the standing peculiarity of the symbolism of our time. Allegory is now to be used actually to hide the truth which it is supposed to make clear."[69] It is a mistake to suggest that Chesterton deliberately limited his use of symbols because of their potential danger. It is more accurate to say that he wanted to use them within a framework through which they could be properly understood. Ultimately, Christianity allowed him to do this. The ability of the Christian faith to provide a complete explanation for the universe was something that attracted Chesterton to it. Colin Manlove has commented on the reasoning behind this: "The disappearance early in the seventeenth century of the Christian symbolist picture of the universe, wherein each item in creation could be seen as distinct with conferred meaning, led to a divorce between the perceptions of objects and of concepts by the human mind."[70] In contrast to the modern era, the medieval period was full of Christian symbolism, and this was one of the reasons behind Chesterton's fascination with it.[71]

Various kinds of symbolic devices can be traced throughout Chesterton's work, especially in his fiction. A visual type can be seen to occur in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Auberon Quin decrees that the regions of London are to become small independent nations, represented by their own national colours. Auberon's inspiration for this comes from the ex-President of Nicaragua: "Can you not understand the ancient sanctity of colours? The Church has her symbolic colours. And think of what colours

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[68] Hunter, *G.K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory*, p. 14. In her book, Hunter distinguishes between a number of related literary devices in Chesterton's work, including allegory, metaphor, analogy, emblem, symbol and parable. While Hunter's analysis is interesting and incisive, I am not convinced that Chesterton would have made such detailed distinctions. He consistently failed to show that level of detail in any of his other ideas.

[69] G.K. Chesterton, "Symbolism without Meaning", *The Illustrated London News* (1907; repr. *Collected Works Volume 27: The Illustrated London News 1905-1907*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 475.

[70] Colin Manlove, *Literature and Reality: 1600-1800* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1978), p. 210.

[71] Chesterton's love of the medieval period permeates much of his writings, and is particularly explicit in *The Return of Don Quixote* (1927). This is a subject that I will return to briefly in chapter five.

mean to us – think of the position of one like myself, who can see nothing but those two colours, nothing but the red and the yellow."[72]

Many of Chesterton's fictional characters also operate as symbols. His use of personality types can be seen in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, where we encounter the fanatic (Adam Wayne) and the humorist (Auberon Quin). Chesterton explained this technique in his *Autobiography*:

> When a writer invents a character for the purposes of fiction, especially of light or fanciful fiction, he fits him out with all sorts of features meant to be effective in that setting and against that background. He may have taken, and probably has taken, a hint from a human being. But he will not hesitate to alter the human being, especially in externals, because he is not thinking of a portrait but of a picture.[73]

As we noted earlier in this chapter, Chesterton tried to imitate the essence of reality rather than its details, and this explains the symbolism that we find in his fiction. Ian Boyd describes the effect this has on Chesterton's characters: "Chesterton's characterization is in terms of the typical rather than the individual, so that what one encounters in his fiction is not a series of fully rounded characters, but a series of political and social types. The importance of each character is in what he represents and in what he tells one about a particular Chestertonian point of view rather than in what he is."[74] Boyd illustrates his point with an example from *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. He suggests that the character 'Buck' represents Chesterton's view of the quintessential businessman.

The symbolic use of characters is something that Chesterton saw and admired in Dickens. Garry Wills tells us that: "Chesterton knew from the first that Dickens' greatness lay in his subtle use of symbol."[75] Chesterton was aware that Dickens'

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[72] Chesterton, *Napoleon of Notting Hill*, p. 23. (The heraldry in this novel is a further link to the medieval period.) Chesterton's fascination with colours, and the colour red in particular, is discussed by Kevin Morris in his article, "Chesterton Sees Red: The Metaphysics of a Colour", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 21 No. 4 (November 1995). This is a theme that I will return to in the concluding chapter.

[73] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, pp. 333-4.

[74] Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton*, p. 11.

[75] Garry Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 68.

symbolism was not always intentional, but he thought that it flowed from an acute perception of life and humanity. Introducing *Great Expectations*, Chesterton wrote: "A great man of letters or any great artist is symbolic without knowing it. The things he describes are types because they are truths. Shakespeare may, or may not, have ever put it to himself that Richard the Second was a philosophical symbol; but all good criticism must necessarily see him so."[76] Chesterton liked the symbolism he found in Dickens' characters because he thought that it represented the essence of certain personality types: "Chesterton attributes the brilliance of the characterisations to an ability to find the vast yet unchanging essence of a person; and then create the physical limits of a human being around it."[77]

Chesterton probably took some of the inspiration for his fiction from Dickens' use of character. This is alluded to by Lynette Hunter when she discusses the 'fundamental stylistic elements' that they had in common: "They both produced caricatures of people; they both had the journalistic habit of writing to a set length that creates pulses of movement through a book; and most of all they both used exaggeration in an original and creative manner."[78] In spite of these similarities, Dickens is normally regarded as the better writer. Dickens' caricatures are usually seen as a virtue, whereas Chesterton's are seen as a fault. Discussing this fault, Chesterton's own brother explained: "Indeed, his judgement is often warped by his tendency to see only ideas when others see only persons."[79] This raises an interesting point. Dickens' characters are highly symbolic, but they are more than just symbols. Chesterton's characters are also symbolic, but they generally lack depth; both of psychological observation and social interaction. This is because Chesterton's emphasis on ideas and propaganda were usually at the expense of

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[76] Chesterton, "On Great Expectations" in *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911; repr. as *Chesterton on Dickens*, London: Everyman, 1992), p. 204.

[77] Hunter, *G.K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory*, p. 49.

[78] *Ibid.*, p. 49. A considerable amount of work exists on the connection between Chesterton and Dickens. For a more detailed discussion see Peter Rae Hunt, *Chesterton and Dickens* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Dalhousie University, 1980); and the special edition of *The Chesterton Review* which looks at Charles Dickens (Vol. 11 No. 4 – November 1985).

[79] Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, pp. 197-8.

his art: "...Chesterton was always far less interested in the artistic execution of his creative writings than he was in the *ideas* he wished those writings to convey..."[80]

In View Of His Limitations As A Writer, Why Did Chesterton Write Fiction?

In his book, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (1984), John Coates explores the way in which Chesterton responded to contemporary thought. We find Chesterton arguing with his contemporaries at every turn. In view of this, it might not be surprising that Chesterton used fiction as a medium for expressing his ideas. But why did Chesterton not stick to other genres when he was so aware of his own limitations as a fictional writer? Part of the answer to this was his belief that fiction had become the most important medium in his age: "Fiction is the primary and central product, the primary and central power of his age. It is our peculiar discovery and our peculiar atmosphere. We think and move in it. It is not merely that more silly people read fiction than anything else; it is also that more clever people write fiction than write anything else."[81]

One of the attractions of fiction is its ability to translate ideas for a wide audience by using metaphor. Metaphors can be used in any type of writing, but they are most closely related to fiction (or poetry), where they are a primary means of communication. In his discussion of the function of metaphor and analogy, Richard Swinburne comments that: "Even if the writer is trying to convey a belief, the way he does it, the style of his writing, may be at least of equal importance to him...the use of metaphor may enable the speaker to get his message home to the hearer, who might pay

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[80] Patrick Keats, *G.K. Chesterton and the Victorians: Dialogue, Dialectic and Synthesis* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: The Catholic University of America, 1994), p. 283. The relative superficiality of Chesterton's use of character limited his ability to portray suffering in his fiction. This is something that I will return to in the final chapter.

[81] G.K. Chesterton, "Chesterton on Meredith", *The Book Lover* (1st May, 1905), p. 52. A similar sentiment is expressed in Chesterton's dictum: "Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity." Chesterton, *The Defendant*, p. 21.

no attention to some dry sentence containing words used in literal senses."[82] There are two ways in which metaphor can translate truth for a wide audience: it can dramatise truth and it can simplify truth.[83] The ability to dramatise truth is pointed out by Sally McFague TeSelle: "A metaphor is a word used in an unfamiliar context to give us a new insight; a good metaphor moves us to see our ordinary world in an extraordinary way."[84] Metaphor can also be used to simplify truth. This does not mean that metaphor is necessarily reductive, but it can often convey ideas in terms that are more easily understood. Chesterton understood this distinction: "Briefly, I have always meant by romance something that may be stated thus. The belief that the simplified and symbolic version of life, which depicts it, under the image of love and war, as a quest with a prize (especially a princess), is nevertheless a true version of life; that is an enlightening symbol and a legitimate simplification."[85]

Throughout history, people have argued that in the act of translating truth, metaphor inevitably distorts truth. This is the accusation that John Bunyan encountered when writing *Pilgrim's Progress* – that "metaphors make us blind".[86] It is also an accusation that Plato makes in *The Republic*, when he tells us that: "The art of representation is therefore a long way removed from truth…"[87] Colin Manlove makes it clear that these accusations are part of a long tradition of suspicion towards metaphor. He writes: "There has in history been a strong vein of belief, Platonic and later Puritan, that literature is lies; and, since lying is the distinctive ability of the devil, the making of any Christian stories but the biblically authorised ones could constitute a wandering from the true spiritual path."[88] According to Manlove, the Christian writers that have used metaphor were painfully aware of the danger of distorting truth: "They know the

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[82] Richard Swinburne, *Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 49. (I have amended one word in the quotation to correct an apparent typographical error. The original quotation reads "…message home to the *speaker*…" rather than, "…message home to the *hearer*…")

[83] Metaphors can also distort truth, which is something that I look at later in this chapter.

[84] TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables*, p. 4. (The same is true of the grotesque, which I will look at in chapter four.)

[85] G.K. Chesterton, "Our Notebook", *The Illustrated London News* (18th April, 1931), p. 628.

[86] John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 46.

[87] Plato, *The Republic*, p. 426.

[88] Colin Manlove, *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 to the Present* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 8.

dangers of invention: they know that new images may divert the mind from the truth contained in them. But they believe also that through such new images the faith can be revitalised..."[89] Chesterton was certainly aware of this predicament. Although he often used metaphor, he recognised that it had the ability to distort truth. In one article on the subject, he wrote: "Reading those words, I never thought of a metaphor being dangerous because it might turn out (in a verbal sense) a bad metaphor. I thought of metaphor being dangerous because it was good metaphor. I thought of metaphor sophisticating morals and confounding philosophy from the beginning of the world."[90]

As Chesterton recognised, metaphor has the potential to distort truth. Yet this does not mean that it necessarily distorts truth. This distinction is a vital one if we are to defend the ability of metaphor to truthfully convey an idea. Many analytical philosophers have suggested that metaphors cannot convey truth as effectively as propositional sentences. In response to this, Richard Swinburne provides us with a helpful observation: "However, all sentences have border areas for their truth...Metaphorical sentences simply have wider border areas than most other sentences..."[91] Propositional statements are not entirely accurate in the truth they communicate because no language is completely precise. Thus metaphor should be seen as a legitimate means of communication.[92] Long before the twentieth century's preoccupation with the philosophy of language,[93] St Thomas Aquinas saw that the problems involved in using language to talk about God required a solution that involved both propositional and metaphoric language: "The recognition of the role of the imagination in theology was not, however, confined to the Romantics. Aquinas, as we shall see, stressed the

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[89] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[90] G.K. Chesterton, "The Danger of Metaphor", *The Illustrated London News* (1906; repr. *Collected Works Vol. 27*), p. 128.

[91] Swinburne, *Revelation*, p. 46.

[92] Some philosophers have argued that the lack of clarity within language means that we cannot talk meaningfully about anything at all. However, any argument for this involves an inherent contradiction, because the author is using language in a meaningful sense to tell us that language is meaningless. In view of this, it seems reasonable to assume that language is meaningful, at least in some sense.

[93] Much of the recent work in the philosophy of religion concerns the use of language to talk about God. Philosophers such as Kai Nielsen and Anthony Flew have argued that the term God is linguistically meaningless.

importance of analogy in the theological enterprise..."[94] Aquinas argued that metaphor was an important tool in language: "But sacred doctrine makes use of metaphors as both necessary and useful."[95]

Literature And Metaphor – More Than Translated Truth

So far I have argued that Chesterton used metaphor to translate ideas into simpler, more dramatic terms, and that this did not necessarily distort the ideas he was communicating. Yet this is only a partial answer to my original question regarding Chesterton's use of fiction. To understand Chesterton's use of metaphor properly, we need to begin by looking more closely at the word 'metaphor'.

In her book, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Janet Martin Soskice tells us that, "a metaphor is established as soon as it is clear that one thing is being spoken of in terms that are suggestive of another and can be extended until this is no longer the case."[96] Although Soskice believes that a metaphor suggests something else, she is quick to point out that it is not a substitution for that other thing. Soskice rejects all substitution theories of metaphor as inadequate. If a metaphor is purely a substitution for another word, then why not just use that other word? A metaphor might offer an interesting alternative, but it quickly becomes superfluous in philosophical terms: "Even then, the use of the metaphorical substitute for plain talk might be just as likely, as Locke says, to confuse as to enlighten. The assumed ready availability of a literal substitute makes the value of metaphor, especially for the purpose of philosophical and scientific reasoning, negligible."[97] Metaphors are not substitute words, because they allude to a number of different things. When the Psalms talk about God as a 'rock', they do not

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[94] Wright, *Theology and Literature*, p. 8. For a clear and concise explanation of Aquinas' doctrine of analogy, see Brian Davies, "Chapter 4: Talking About God", *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

[95] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 1, Article 9, Reply Objection 1, (Vol.1, Trans. English Dominican Fathers, London: Burns & Oates, 1947), p. 6. The way in which Chesterton relates to the Thomistic tradition is something that I will look at in the next chapter.

[96] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 23.

[97] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

simply mean that God is big, or that God is solid, or that God is strong. The metaphor of a 'rock' conjures up all of these images, and more: that is why it is so powerful. Hence Chesterton's declaration that: "Men tell more truth by their metaphors than by their statements."[98]

As an extended metaphor,[99] a story has the ability to convey a number of different ideas and images, that could not otherwise be conveyed: "The condensation of the meaning of the metaphor into concept catches a part, but not all, of the metaphor. The metaphor speaks to us on a deeper level."[100] Chesterton explained that the metaphor was central to literature because of its ability to hold a number of different images together: "The metaphor, the symbol, the picture, has appeared to most critics to be a mere ornament, a piece of moulding above the gateway; but it is actually the keystone of the arch."[101] Ian Boyd suggests that this is why Chesterton was attracted to fiction: "...the allegory is never a mere translation of a discursive argument into symbolic terms. There is a sense in which the meaning does not exist apart from the allegory which reveals it. This may be why Chesterton speaks of the artistic mind that 'sees things as they are in a picture'."[102] The ability of metaphor to capture the fullness of life is conveyed by Chesterton in one of his Father Brown stories, when Father Brown explains why he likes the puppet show so much: "For one reason...Because it contains the secret of this tragedy."[103]

The symbolism that we have already observed in Chesterton's fiction works in a similar way to metaphor.[104] Its power is derived from its ability to communicate an array of different images simultaneously. Most of these are consciously intended by the author,

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[98] Chesterton, "Objections to the Party System", *The Illustrated London News* (1910; repr. *Collected Works Vol. 28*) p. 648.

[99] Technically speaking, an extended metaphor is usually described as an allegory. However, my use of the phrase stands if we accept Chesterton's view that all literature is allegorical in some sense.

[100] Ken Bailey, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), p. 19.

[101] G.K. Chesterton, "The Bones of a Poem", *A Handful of Authors*, p. 103.

[102] Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton*, p. 8.

[103] G.K. Chesterton, "The Pursuit of Mr Blue", *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 96.

[104] See my explanation of the way that I am using the terms 'symbol' and 'symbolism' in footnote 67.

although the symbol in question will probably convey other connected images of which the author has not consciously thought. This is what Chesterton meant when he wrote: "If truth is a plan or pattern of things that really are, or in other words, if truth truly exists outside ourselves, or in other words, if truth exists at all, it must be often possible for a writer to uncover a corner of it which he happens not to understand, but which his reader does happen to understand. The author sees only two lines; the reader sees where they meet and what is the angle."[105]

Although a symbol can suggest images that the author does not consciously intend, it is still largely controlled by the author. Symbols suggest a finite set of images, and this set is determined by the choice of symbol that the author makes. Chesterton was keen to affirm authorial intention. He saw the spiritual significance of the author's attempt to communicate a vision of life: "The poet, like the priest, should bear the ancient title of the builder of the bridge. His claim is exactly that he can really cross the chasm between the world of unspoken and seemingly unspeakable truths to the world of spoken words. His triumph is when the bridge is completed and the word is spoken; above all, when it is heard."[106]

Chesterton's use of symbolism and metaphor has led a number of his critics to liken his fiction to parables. For example, Cecil Chesterton tells us that: "In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and the tales which have followed it he tried to use for the same purpose [i.e. propaganda] the very old method of parable or fable."[107] Parable (or fable) allowed Chesterton to communicate his concepts and ideas using pictures, a style that is more familiar to the Middle Eastern mind: "The Middle Eastern mind creates meaning by the use of simile, metaphor, proverb, parable, and dramatic action…The primary language is that of the metaphor/parable and the secondary language is the conceptual

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[105] Chesterton, "On The Old Curiosity Shop", *Chesterton on Dickens*, p. 60.

[106] Chesterton, "The Middleman in Poetry", *Sidelights on New London and Newer York*, p. 209. For Chesterton's own analysis of the spiritual significance of this image, see Chesterton, "The God with the Golden Key", *Autobiography*.

[107] Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism*, p. 196. Ian Boyd makes the same point when he tells us that Chesterton's fiction, "may be described as political fables, parables, and allegories..." in Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton*, p. 5.

interpretation of the metaphor that in Biblical literature is often given with it."[108] His use of parable does not make Chesterton any less theological. It is simply a different style of theology to the one that most of us are used to: "In most forms of discourse, we from the West begin with an idea and then occasionally *illustrate* that idea with a simile, metaphor, or parable. The conceptual language is primary and the metaphor or parable is secondary…For indeed, the story is presented only to clarify the meaning of the concept."[109]

Parables enabled Chesterton to resolve the tension between reason and the imagination by offering a form where both elements were integral: "The essential Chesterton, however, is found in the imaginative argument which comes in the shape of what Chesterton calls variously an allegory, a fable, or a parable. And even here it is important to note that the imaginative argument is inseparable from the concrete image or story which expresses it. There is no abstract argument that exists apart from the story. The story is itself the argument."[110] Gabriel Gale makes this point in *The Poet and the Lunatics*: "I doubt whether any truth can be told except in a parable."[111]

Conclusion

Following in the tradition of Samuel Johnson, Chesterton believed that literature was both imitative and moral. It was firmly rooted in this world and not a pale reflection of another one, and in this sense, Chesterton can be seen as a realist. At the same time, Chesterton thought that literature should represent the essence of humanity rather than the details surrounding the context of that humanity. This view allowed his fiction to

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[108] Bailey, *Finding the Lost*, p. 16. Although Bailey argues that the story is primary for the Middle Eastern mindset, he does not think that this negates conceptual interpretation: "First, conceptualization/interpretation of the metaphor is not a strange aberration imposed on the Biblical metaphor by a non-Middle Eastern mind. Existentialists have denied *any* form of conceptualization of metaphor…But Biblical authors themselves often encase their metaphors in conceptualizations which focus the reader's interpretative reflection." (p. 17.)

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[110] Ian Boyd, "In Search of the Essential Chesterton", *VII: An Anglo-American Literary Review* Vol. 1 (1980), p. 32.

[111] G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd. 1962), p. 92.

exaggerate and distort the details of 'reality' in order, paradoxically, to convey its 'true nature'. Chesterton also identified with Johnson's recognition of the moral dimension of literature, though he understood it differently at significant points. These two postulates help to explain the world that we encounter in Chesterton's fiction.

I have defended the ability of literature – as an extended form of metaphor – to communicate theological concepts without distorting them. Yet Chesterton wrote fiction because he saw within it, a unique ability to communicate an array of different images within a single framework. This is why many of Chesterton's stories are parabolic.

Furthermore, Chesterton's parables are often written in the form of detective stories. Along with the Father Brown stories, examples of this include *The Club of Queer Trades* and *Four Faultless Felons*. Some of his other stories have elements of this genre within them although they are not overtly detective stories (e.g. *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*). Lynette Hunter has pointed out that this particular genre was well suited to Chesterton's parabolic style: "The detective story as Chesterton creates it gives one a picture with all the necessary evidence. It is an allegory of life in which man has to realise and act upon the significance of the clues he has been given."[112] She continues: "The Father Brown stories constitute both an interpretation and an expression of Chesterton's philosophy."[113]

It is important to note the consciously autobiographical strain in his fiction. Many of his stories contain autobiographical elements; the most obvious example being, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Chesterton thought that his own story provided a framework for the symbols within his parables: "Now why do I offer here this handful of scrappy topics, types, metaphors all totally disconnected? Because I am not now

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[112] Hunter, *G.K. Chesterton; Explorations in Allegory*, p. 157. Elmar Schenkel explains that: "Time and again critics have pointed out the structural resemblances between detective stories and earlier religious literature such as the sermon or the Puritan quest." Elmar Schenkel, "Visions from the Verge: Terror and Play in G.K. Chesterton's Imagination" in Kath Filmer, ed., *Twentieth-Century Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in Twentieth-Century Mythopoeic Literature* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), p. 34.

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 157. The theological elements of detective fiction are explored further by Robert S. Paul in his book, *Whatever Happened to Sherlock Holmes: Detective Fiction, Popular Theology and Society* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

expounding a religious system. I am finishing a story; rounding off what has been to me at least a romance, and very much of a mystery story."[114]

Long before the current popularity of narrative theology, Chesterton understood something of the relationship between story and theology. He did not think that the Christian faith was untrue and thus best described in terms of a story. (He was a self-confessed dogmatist.) Nor did he believe that stories were the only way to understand theology. (He wrote a number of non-fictional works on theology.) He simply thought that literature offered a unique insight into what life was really like: "Life may sometimes legitimately appear as a book of science. Life may sometimes appear. and with a much greater legitimacy, as a book of metaphysics. But life is always a novel."[115] It is for this reason, that I intend to use Chesterton's fiction to look at his conception of evil.

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[114] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 352.

[115] Chesterton, *Heretics*, p. 192.

Chapter 3: The Nature of Evil

The whole question of evil has a number of important implications for theology, both practically and theoretically. Even for those not normally interested in metaphysics, suffering raises unavoidable questions. As Karl Rahner, one of the most influential contemporary theologians, declares: "It can scarcely be denied that this is one of the most fundamental questions of human experience."[1] Chesterton was no exception to Rahner's observation. His concern for both metaphysical and practical questions, led him to reflect upon the theological issues surrounding evil: "While acknowledging religious mystery, he wished to keep close to solid reality and plain common sense. He knew that positive evil and original sin were the starting-point of his argument…"[2]

While the problem of evil is a popular theme in the contemporary philosophy of religion, few writers seem interested in trying to define evil.[3] This point is illustrated in Barry Whitney's important reference work, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography On The Problem of Evil, 1960-1990*. Whitney consigns what he terms 'historical theodicy' to an appendix, and provides the following justification: "I suspect that those who write from an historical (or certainly from a Thomistic) perspective probably consider themselves writing in the 'mainstream', but the sheer weight of publications in the scholarly journals would not bear this out."[4]

It is interesting to consider why this is the case. One reason is that evil is often defined in terms of goodness, and goodness in terms of God. Thus the confusion over the

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[1] Karl Rahner, "Why Does God Allow Us To Suffer?", *Theological Investigations Vol. XIX: Faith and Ministry* (Trans. Edward Quinn, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984), p. 194.

[2] Emile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1937), p. 23.

[3] For example, none of the following works contain anything significant by way of an attempt to identify what evil is: J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*; Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*; Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Evil and A Good God*, Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*. The one notable exception to this is John Hick's classic, *Evil and the God of Love*, which considers the matter extensively.

[4] Barry L. Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil, 1960-1990* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), p. 377.

concept of God that has marked much twentieth-century theology,[5] makes it even harder to define evil. Alternatively, a more pragmatic explanation can be given – evil is not defined because it is too difficult. When Richard Worsley defends the limitations of his book by admitting that, "evil is notoriously difficult to define",[6] he echoes the King in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, who declared: "If there's no meaning in it, that saves a whole world of trouble."[7]

Some contemporary writers on evil not only make no attempt to identify its nature; they actually advocate the avoidance of such discussions. In his book on good and evil, Raimond Gaita tries to avoid being forced into admitting whether or not he believes in the reality of good and evil. When pressed on the subject, he declares: "It would be better, at least in ethics, to banish the word 'ontology'."[8] Yet without any recourse to ontology, ethics becomes relativistic, and it is no longer possible to condemn an act as being evil in any absolute sense.

Other writers suggest that the lack of any definition for evil should be seen as an asset. In his introduction to *The Anthropology of Evil*, David Parkin writes: "As regards the term 'evil' itself in English, its loose analytical value has enabled the contributors in this volume to go beyond such conventional categories as ghost or witch in their studies, and to pick out what they see as distinctive in the cultures they look at…this might suggest that such odd-job words as 'evil' are in fact good for anthropologists to think."[9]

Whatever the reasons for not defining evil, the same problem remains. Without definition, words become meaningless. It is ironic that while contemporary writers have

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[5] One example of the point that I am trying to make here is the 'death of God theology' of theologians such as Thomas Altizer. For an interesting, if rather aggressive, critique of the confusion caused by death of God theology, see John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1975).

[6] Richard Worsley, *Human Freedom and the Logic of Evil* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996), p. 8.

[7] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865; repr. London: Everyman, 1993), p. 100.

[8] Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1991), p. 192.

[9] David Parkin, ed., *The Anthropology Of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 23.

not seemed concerned about this in regard to evil, they have shown great concern for defining the term 'God'. The work of thinkers such as Wittgenstein has prompted philosophers such as Anthony Flew and Kai Nielsen to suggest that the very concept of God is linguistically meaningless. In response, theists have sought to explain more precisely what they mean when they talk about God.[10] In the same way that God has to be a meaningful term if we are to talk about God; evil has to be a meaningful term if we are to talk about the problem of evil.[11] Otherwise discussion becomes like a present day Tower of Babel in which everyone speaks and yet no-one understands. This was one reason that Chesterton wrote so prolifically. Not only was he interested in writing about a wide variety of subjects, but he also saw that a wide variety of subjects needed to be written about. Chesterton warned against meaningless talk:

> It is perfectly true that there is something in all good things that is beyond all speech or figures of speech. But it is also true that there is in all good things a perpetual desire for expression and concrete embodiment; and though the attempt to embody is always inadequate, the attempt is always made…
> …The charlatan who has no idea will always confine himself to explaining that it is much too subtle to be explained.[12]

As the quotation above conveys, Chesterton sought for greater clarity, but he was not naive enough to think that everything could be fully defined and explained. This is a healthy perspective for those trying to understand the nature of evil. Although I have argued for the importance of trying to define what evil is, the difficulties of doing so quickly remind us that "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror…"[13] Our understanding is limited, and it is with that in mind that we should heed the advice of

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[10] Examples of linguistic attacks against the concept of God can be found in works such as Kai Nielsen, "The Intelligibility of God Talk", *Religious Studies* 6 (1970); and Anthony Flew & Alasdair McIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (1955; repr. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1972), especially chapter 6 – Theology and Falsification. Respondents to such attacks include: Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (1962; repr. London: Fontana Library, 1970); and Ian Ramsey, *Religious Language* (1957; repr. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1973).

[11] Analytic theistic philosophers have pointed out that the logical problem of evil is sometimes the result of confusion over the meaning of words such as good and evil: "It is always too easy to assume that one knows what *things* are good and what *events* are equal as God evaluates them…" in Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God*, p. 77. Further discussion of this point can be found in chapter seven.

[12] G.K. Chesterton, "The Mystagogue" *A Miscellany of Men* (1912; repr. London: Methuen & Co. 1926), pp. 145-7.

[13] 1 Corinthians 13:12 (New International Version).

Plotinus: "Whoever inquires from whence evils originate…will begin his inquiry in a proper manner, if he first establishes what evil is, and defines its nature…"[14]

Father Brown & Chesterton's Theology Of Evil

In the previous chapter, I argued that fiction offers a unique insight into Chesterton's theology. As Sister Marie Virginia observes: "Repeatedly Chesterton reminded his readers that religion cannot be excluded from any form of literature, because it includes everything."[15] In this section, I want to suggest that the Father Brown stories[16] are particularly valuable for anyone who is interested in examining Chesterton's theology of evil. Ronald Knox hints at this when he says: "Nearly always, there is a philosophical or at least a political idea at the very heart of each story."[17] Although much of Chesterton's fiction has a propagandist edge to it, the Father Brown stories stand out as tales with morals attached to them. One of the more obvious reasons for this is that they are all short stories – a genre that is well suited to making a particular point. (Longer stories that make one point continuously sound more like homilies, because a reader expects a long story to contain a number of different points/morals.)

A number of critics have noted that the philosophical overtones of the Father Brown stories include the subject of evil. In his book on Chesterton, Matthias Wörther refers to the religious understanding of evil that can be seen in the method of Father Brown.[18] Another critic, Frederick Crosson, notes that this is one of the major differences between Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes. He explains the unique nature of the

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[14] Plotinus, *On the Nature and Origin of Evil*, (Trans. Thomas Taylor, *Five Books of Plotinus*, London: Edward Jeffrey, 1794), p. 57.

[15] Sister Marie Virginia, *G.K. Chesterton's Evangel* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1937), pp. 29-30.

[16] The Father Brown stories number fifty-three in all. *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911) contains twelve stories; *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914) contains twelve stories; *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926) contains eight stories, *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927) contains ten stories; and *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935) contains eight stories. In addition to these five collections, there are three other Father Brown stories: "Father Brown and the Donnington Affair", "The Vampire of the Village", and "The Mask of Midas".

[17] Ronald Knox, *Literary Distractions* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1958), p. 167.

[18] Matthias Wörther's book, *G.K. Chesterton – Das Unterhaltsame Dogma*, is reviewed by Josef Hoffart in *The Chesterton Review*, Vol. 12 No. 1 (February 1986), pp. 89-92.

Father Brown stories: "It is rather that the stories are not just stories of crimes in a legal. or even a moral sense. The crimes they tell of are evil deeds. deeds prompted by the Evil one, crimes not only against man but against God – and crimes which violate the soul of the actor himself."[19] Perhaps the most detailed examination of the association between evil and the Father Brown stories is to be found in chapter five of Gillian Cross' PhD thesis, G.K. *Chesterton and the Decadents* (Sussex University. 1973). She introduces the second half of her chapter with the following observation: "A fairly comprehensive, if fragmented, presentation of Chesterton's views on sin and the workings of evil in the mind can be found in the Father Brown stories, which were written throughout the latter part of his life, from 1911 onwards."[20]

In his *Autobiography*, Chesterton tells the reader how he was initially inspired to write the Father Brown stories.[21] He met a priest (Father John O'Connor) who had a considerable knowledge of evil through his role in the confessional. When Chesterton later heard two Cambridge undergraduates remark that although the priest was very friendly, it was a shame that he did not know anything about the real evil in the world. Chesterton was struck by the irony of it all. As Chesterton went on to explain: "And there sprang up in my mind the vague idea of making some artistic use of this comic yet tragic cross-purposes; and constructing a comedy in which a priest should appear to know nothing and in fact know more about crime than the criminals."[22] The Father Brown that emerged from this incident was based loosely on Father John O'Connor, not so much in appearance, but in his understanding and awareness of evil. In "The Absence of Mr Glass", Chesterton returned to the incident that first prompted him to write the stories. The famous criminologist, Dr Hood, patronises Father Brown because he thinks that the priest does not understand the criminal mind: "You, with your small parochial responsibilities, see only this particular Mrs MacNab, terrified with this particular tale of two voices..."[23] As in the story of the two Cambridge graduates and

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[19] Frederick J. Crosson, "Father Brown, Sherlock Holmes, and the Mystery of Man", Rufus William Rauch, ed., *A Chesterton Celebration* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 28.

[20] Gillian Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Sussex University, 1973), p. 112. See the introductory chapter of my thesis for further comment on Cross' work.

[21] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), pp. 336-339.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 339.

[23] G.K. Chesterton, *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 14.

Father O'Connor, the irony is that Father Brown has a considerable understanding of evil and the criminal mind (as is demonstrated later on when he explains the solution to Dr Hood). As Father Brown comments elsewhere: "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil?"[24]

Father Brown understands evil, and this enables him to solve each crime with which he is faced. His entire methodology stems from this ability to understand the moral evil[25] that flows from the human heart: "Since crime for the meek priest is, in most cases, of a moral and psychological order, very often derived from one of the vices of Christian theology, such as pride, greed or lust, his methods of detection belong also to a moral order."[26] Because Father Brown believes in the idea of 'human nature', he is able to identify with evil rather than merely understand it in an abstract sense. In "The Secret of Father Brown" (the opening chapter in *The Secret of Father Brown*), Father Brown explains his methodology to Mr Chace. When Mr Chace presses Father Brown on this subject, he is shocked by the response of Father Brown: "You see, I had murdered them all myself. So, of course, I knew how it was done."[27] Father Brown then proceeds to explain that he does not commit the crimes in a physical/material sense. Instead, he empathises with the criminal in order to understand the criminal. This is possible because he shares the same human nature as the criminal. Hence he declares in "The Hammer of God": "I am a man and therefore have all devils in my heart."[28] The limitation of Father Brown's methodology is that he struggles to solve crimes that are not orientated around simple human sins. Fortunately for him, Chesterton rarely wrote any other type of story. Yet there are occasions when Father Brown has to admit his limitations: "Oh, I know well enough when I'm out of my depth; and I knew I should be, when I found we were hunting a fraudulent financier instead of an ordinary human

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[24] G.K. Chesterton, "The Blue Cross", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, (1911; repr. *The Annotated Innocence of Father Brown*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 39.

[25] The distinction between moral evil and natural evil is discussed in chapter seven.

[26] Elmar Schenkel, "Visions from the Verge: Terror and Play in G.K. Chesterton's Imagination" in Kath Filmer, ed., *Twentieth-Century Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society and Belief in Twentieth-Century Mythopoeic Literature* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), p. 35.

[27] G.K. Chesterton, "The Secret of Father Brown", *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 11.

[28] G.K. Chesterton, "The Hammer of God", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 195.

murderer…Now murder's almost always human and personal; but modern theft has been allowed to become quite impersonal."[29]

Historic Christian Theology & The Nature Of Evil

Philosophical discussion about evil has always oscillated between the two extremes of dualism and monism.[30] The problem of dualism is essentially that it leaves too many questions unanswered (e.g. dualism has no first cause from which to explain the beginning of creation). The problem of monism, is that it suggests that all is one. and thus that there is no difference between good and evil. Thus evil becomes little more than an illusion; a view which falls painfully short of our everyday experience.

Combining either view with Christianity raises additional difficulties. Both radical dualism and radical monism would seem to contradict central tenets within Christianity. Radical dualism challenges the core of the Christian doctrine of God. with its belief that God is the Omnipotent Creator: Christianity has no place for an equal independent rival divinity. By contrast, radical monism's contention that good and evil are merely aspects of a single universal structure calls into question the doctrine of the atonement."[31] In light of these problems, Christian thinkers have had to find some explanation by which Christianity can combine its belief in God as the creator of everything that exists, with a belief in the reality of evil. John Hick articulates the predicament when he writes: "This dilemma has haunted all attempts to arrive at a Christian understanding of evil…in the end we have to acknowledge that both polar truths are valid and inescapable."[32]

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[29] G.K. Chesterton. "The Mask of Midas" (1936; repr. *Collected Works Volume 14: Short Stories, Fairy Tales, Mystery Stories*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 409.

[30] These two poles of thought are discussed in chapter two of John Hick's book, *Evil and the God of Love*, 3rd ed. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985).

[31] If there is no evil and no sin, there was no need for Jesus to die on the cross for the sake of mankind.

[32] John Hick. *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 16.

St Augustine's explanation of the nature of evil was influenced by his desire to respond to the arguments of the Manichees, who believed that the universe was dualistic.[33] In an attempt to reassert the sovereignty of God, Augustine formulated his definition of evil as "*privatio boni*" (the privation of good).[34] This idea had its roots in the teaching of both Aristotle and Plotinus.[35] Augustine's theory of evil was taken up by St Thomas Aquinas who also argued that privation provided the best explanation of evil. Aquinas understood evil as the "absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing."[36] His basic conception of the nature of evil was very similar to that of Augustine, although there was a slight change of emphasis.[37]

Both Augustine and Aquinas defended their doctrine of 'evil as a privation' from the charge of treating evil as an illusion. This was necessary as the idea of privation appeared similar to the idea of negation (i.e. nothingness). The famous example that Aquinas used was the example of blindness.[38] Blindness is something rather than nothing, but that something is essentially an absence - the absence of a particular good that is naturally due (i.e. sight). For Aquinas, "Evil denote[d] the lack of good, not a mere absence".[39] In trying to explain this, Herbert McCabe uses another example: "If I

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[33] The Manichees were a third-century sect founded by the Persian, Mani. They believed the world was split into good (spirit) and evil, (matter) which was grounded in two co-eternal and independent cosmic powers of light and darkness.

[34] For a more comprehensive treatment of Augustine's theory of evil, see G.R. Evans, *Augustine On Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[35] However, Augustine's theory of evil as a privation was noticeably different from earlier Greek thought: "Although Aristotle treats of the various forms of privation...he does not develop a specific doctrine of evil as a privation." Leo J. Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St Thomas Aquinas: in a Historical Perspective* (Trans. Dr John Dudley, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), p. 124. Plotinus is not any nearer to Augustine in this respect: "The work done by Greek thinkers was able to prepare for the elaboration of this definition of evil, but it is...not found in Plotinus...", Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Evil* (1961; trans. Michael Barry, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), p. 28.

[36] St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 49, Article 1 (Vol. 1, trans. English Dominican Fathers, London: Burns & Oates, 1947-8), p. 253.

[37] "[Aquinas] renders the traditional definition more precise by giving priority...to 'deprivation' and 'defect'." John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 94. A more detailed discussion of Aquinas' theory of evil as privation can be found in Edward Cook, *The Deficient Cause of Moral Evil According to Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values, 1996), especially "Chapter 2: The Nature of Evil". In addition, the intellectualism of Aquinas is significantly different to the voluntarism of Augustine.

[38] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 5, Article 3, Reply Objection 2, p. 25. & Part 1, Questions 48, Article 2, Reply Objection 2, p. 250.

[39] Norman Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1974), p. 341.

have a hole in my sock, the hole is not anything at all, it is just an absence of wool or cotton or whatever, but it is a perfectly real hole in my sock.. It would be absurd to say that holes in socks are unreal and illusory just because the hole isn't made of anything and is purely an absence. *Nothing* in the wrong place can be just as real and just as important as *something* in the wrong place."[40] Following on from this, the question arises of what the ontological status of evil is? Norman Geisler provides us with a helpful phrase when he describes evil as, "an ontological parasite".[41]

Although the theory of evil as a privation has appeared to offer the best solution to the Christian's dilemma concerning evil, it remains a difficult concept. One area of difficulty concerns its expression, a point noted by Brian Horne: "...for the concept of evil as privation, absence or lack conveys a frustrating sense of abstraction: the atmosphere of the philosopher's study, remote from the experience of the violence, cruelty and hatred of the real world."[42] Horne goes on to articulate the problem of imagining evil as a privation: "If evil is only an absence, it cannot be imagined and certainly cannot be personified."[43] This problem can be seen illustrated in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. According to the theory of privation, no being can be totally evil.[44] When Milton tries to imagine this in his great epic, the ensuing complexity is portrayed in Satan. Consequently, this has led readers to see him more as a tragic hero than an evil villain, resulting in a greater sympathy for Satan than Milton originally intended. Yet, as Chesterton acknowledged: "Milton's devil is only grand because he is half an archangel."[45] The way in which the theory of evil as a privation might be portrayed. is a subject to which I will return in chapters four, five, and six.

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[40] Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), p. 29.

[41] Geisler, *Philosophy Of Religion*, p. 336.

[42] Brian Horne, *Imagining Evil* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1996), p. 43.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 41.

[44] "Nothing, however, can be wholly evil, since privation always exists in a subject and that subject, as an existing thing, is good". David Gallagher, "Aquinas on Goodness and Moral Goodness", David Gallagher, ed., *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1994), p. 45.

[45] G.K. Chesterton, *Notebook* 73321B, 1892, p. 32., "The Department of Manuscripts", British Library, London.

Is Chesterton Part Of The Thomistic School?

To help us understand Chesterton's comments on evil, it is helpful to locate his theology within a historical context. Therefore, we will look at his relationship to the historic Christian position on evil, before going on to investigate Chesterton's views at first hand. In the previous section we focused on the theory of evil as a privation, an idea advocated by both Augustine and Aquinas. Although Chesterton has not particularly been linked to Augustine, many critics have discussed his connection to the Thomistic school. It is that connection that I wish to explore here.[46]

There is almost an endless list of writers who have commented on the connection between Chesterton and Aquinas. Some of these have denied Chesterton's status as a Thomist, arguing that, "no one could claim that in any strict sense Chesterton was a systematic philosopher or a Thomist, although much critical work on Chesterton tries to prove just that."[47] Others, as Dale points out, have argued that Chesterton should be seen as a Thomist. Hugh Kenner writes: "When late in life he came to grips with systematic philosophy, he was able to produce without apparent effort a profound study of St Thomas Aquinas, because St Thomas expounded in an orderly fashion what Gilbert Chesterton had been seeing and saying all his life."[48] In a similar vein, Emile Cammaerts observes that Chesterton "expounded the foundations of Thomist theology",[49] while M. Molyneaux has suggested that Chesterton be viewed as an "Optimistic Thomist."[50] In between these positions, critics such as Quentin Lauer have

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[46] In this section I am using the term "Thomist" rather loosely, to refer to Thomas Aquinas and those that follow in that tradition. I am aware that there is a great deal of diversity within Thomism that I have chosen to ignore as it is not directly relevant to my thesis. However, it is useful to note that Chesterton's reading of Aquinas was probably influenced by the Neo-Thomists of his period. Chesterton seems to have had some correspondence with Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, and probably read some of their writings. Perhaps more significant was his close friendship with Father Vincent McNabb, who was heavily influenced by Aquinas.

[47] Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 290.

[48] Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948), pp. 5-6.

[49] Emile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet*, p. 5.

[50] M. Molyneaux, *G.K. Chesterton As Literary Critic* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Ulster Polytechnic, 1984), chapter 1.

taken a more ambivalent approach, which affirms a link between Chesterton and Aquinas, but falls short of declaring him a Thomist.[51]

Ostensibly, there are two important pieces of evidence that link Chesterton to Aquinas. The first is that they were both great apologists for the Catholic Church. Having officially been received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1922, it is hardly surprising that Chesterton found great affinity with the greatest philosopher of the Catholic tradition. The second piece of evidence is the amount that Chesterton referred to and wrote about Aquinas. This culminated in his critical study, *St Thomas Aquinas*, published in 1933. Many writers on Chesterton have commented on the significance of this work.[52] It is ironic how little research Chesterton put into a book that was to become one of his most poignant and famous works. In her biography, Maisie Ward explains that Chesterton had written half the book before he thought about consulting any other studies on Aquinas, and even then, he hardly read any of the books about Aquinas that his secretary obtained for him.[53] At the same time, Chesterton had read Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* many years before he began to write his own book on Aquinas.[54] It is difficult to determine how much of the *Summa Theologica* Chesterton actually read. It is possible that Chesterton read it from cover to cover, a view hinted at by the comment Father Brown makes in "The Secret Garden": "I used to be fairly good at thinking. I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once."[55]

Yet how significant is it that Chesterton wrote a book on Aquinas? As Ralph McInerny reminds us: "On whom did he not write a book or at least an essay?"[56] Indeed, Chesterton wrote a great deal about many writers with whom he had little affinity. However, in *St Thomas Aquinas* Chesterton repeatedly affirms his admiration for

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[51] See Quentin Lauer, G.K. Chesterton: *Philosopher Without Portfolio* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988).

[52] These include John Coates, *Chesterton and The Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984), p. 18.; Michael Coren, *Gilbert: The Man who was G.K. Chesterton* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), pp. 251-253; and Michael Ffinch, *G.K. Chesterton* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), pp. 335-9.

[53] Recounted in Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1944), p. 525.

[54] Mentioned in Dale, *The Outline Of Sanity*, p. 290.

[55] Chesterton, "The Secret Garden", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 57.

[56] Ralph McInerny, "Chesterton as Peeping Thomist", Rauch, ed., *A Chesterton Celebration*, p. 7.

Aquinas. Examples of this range from the autobiographical traces in Chesterton's book[57] to overt expressions of admiration.[58] The significance of Chesterton's book on Aquinas, over and above the other critical biographies he wrote, is that it was so well received by Thomistic scholars. Perhaps the most famous of these was Etienne Gilson, probably the greatest Aquinas scholar of Chesterton's age. Gilson expressed his respect for Chesterton's study: "I consider it as being without possible comparison the best book ever written on St Thomas. Nothing short of genius can account for such an achievement."[59] More recently, Ralph McInerny, another influential Aquinas scholar, has written an essay suggesting a degree of commonality between Chesterton and Aquinas.[60] Clearly Chesterton's book on Aquinas is more than just another book. He regarded it as an expression of much of his own philosophy, and others have praised its perceptiveness. Despite this obvious affinity between the two men, Chesterton should not automatically be described as a Thomist, as Quentin Lauer explains:

> There is no way of classifying his thought as any kind of 'ism'...Even with regard to Thomas Aquinas... he was not of the 'Thomistic' school in any significant sense...What Chesterton found...was that, when he had thought his way through to a highly metaphysical view of the totality of reality, that view turned out to resemble in highly significant ways that of Aquinas. Whether we can call this the 'influence' of Aquinas is difficult to say.[61]

As Lauer indicates, there are some significant similarities in the metaphysical thought of Chesterton and Aquinas. Two important areas include their analogical thought, and their metaphysical realism.

M. Versfeld defines analogical thinking and notes Chesterton's use of it: "Descriptions of God in terms of created things are called analogical, and what we notice in

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[57] Chesterton introduces St Thomas Aquinas as "a heavy bull of a man", who "was so stolid that the scholars, in the schools which he attended regularly, thought he was a dunce." Chesterton goes on to say that Aquinas, "would much rather be thought a dunce than have his own dreams invaded by more active or animated dunces." G.K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933; repr. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), p. 15. Of course, this is all autobiographical.

[58] For example, Chesterton declares that, "the modern mind needs Thomas Aquinas." *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[59] Quoted in Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*, p. 526.

[60] The essay I am referring to is "Chesterton as Peeping Thomist".

[61] Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher Without Portfolio*, p. 37.

Chesterton is the facility with which he moves from created things to God."[62] Versfeld also notes that the same idea is found in Aquinas' work, where he explained that God could only be discussed in terms of analogy.[63] Versfeld is not the only one to have noted this similarity. Hugh Kenner devotes an entire chapter of his study on Chesterton to the same issue.[64]

The other important similarity between Chesterton and Aquinas is their concern for metaphysical realism. Chesterton observed that Aquinas' belief in life stemmed from this: "It breathes somehow in his very first phrases about the reality of Being. If the morbid Renaissance intellectual is supposed to say, 'To be or not to be – that is the question,' then the massive medieval doctor does most certainly reply in a voice of thunder, 'To be – that is the answer.'"[65] For both Chesterton and Aquinas, their metaphysical realism resulted in a sense of wonder that they existed at all. The significance of this in terms of their response to evil, is a subject that I will address in the concluding chapter. The fact that both men believed that 'a thing was a thing', provided them with a firm foundation for the rest of their thought: "The first doctrine which underlies both the principle of man's dignity and the value of everything in general may be termed metaphysical realism, denoting a profound and even obvious kinship between Chesterton's thought and Thomism. As realism, it affirms that the essential value of any object or being is that it exists."[66]

Having examined the relationship between Chesterton and Thomism, we can conclude that there certainly is a link of sorts. Chesterton had a great affinity with Aquinas, but this does not extend to their having an identical systematic theology; primarily because Chesterton could never be tied down to any particular 'ism'. And yet the closest that Chesterton came to any kind of 'ism' was Thomism. At the same time, we must not forget that Chesterton did not grow up in the Thomistic school, rather he grew up and

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[62] M. Versfeld, "Chesterton and St Thomas", *English Studies In Africa* Vol. 4. No. 2 (September, 1961), p. 133.

[63] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 13, pp. 59-72.

[64] See "Chapter 3: The Idea of Analogy", in Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton.*

[65] G.K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 131-2.

[66] L'Abbe Yves Denis, "The Theological Background of Chesterton's Social Thought", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 7 No. 1 (1981), p. 62.

found himself in it. This was a process that was virtually identical to his discovery of the truth of the Christian faith, a story he recounted in *Orthodoxy*: "I am the man who with the utmost daring discovered what had been discovered before."[67] Therefore, as we move on to investigate Chesterton's thoughts on evil, we should expect to find a large degree of agreement between him and Aquinas (and thus the historic Catholic position). It is a resemblance seen by Christopher Hollis: "Therefore there are in the world forces of good and evil. One might argue whether things in themselves are evil or whether they are merely misused by men. Saint Thomas and Chesterton would both have maintained the latter…"[68]

Chesterton & Dualism

There is a sense in which all Christian writers advocate, or at least flirt with, dualism in some form: "While Christianity has always refuted the claims of thorough-going dualism, it has, in its history, consistently painted pictures of and enunciated propositions about the relationship between good and evil that bear a strong similarity to the explanations that dualism offers for the existence of evil."[69] This is also true of Chesterton's work, where we quickly encounter this vivid struggle between good and evil. It is the opening theme of *The Ball And The Cross*, as Father Michael opposes Professor Lucifer. In *The Poet And The Lunatics*, Gabriel Gale defends superstitious people on the grounds that they grasp something of this epic battle: "They at least read things in black and white, and saw life as the battlefield it is."[70] Gale's comment is an attempt to recognise the difference between good and evil that is required if we are to take evil seriously. As Quentin Lauer points out, "one could go so far as to say that it is

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[67] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr. London: The Bodley Head, 1927), p. 16.

[68] Christopher Hollis, *The Mind Of Chesterton* (London: Hollis & Carter, 1970), p. 256.

[69] Brian Horne, *Imaging Evil*, p. 26. The picture that is painted, of good fighting against evil, can be found in the work of writers such as Milton, Bunyan, Spenser, and J.R. Tolkien. A number of interesting discussions about the work of these and other writers, can be found in Colin Manlove's book, *Christian Fantasy: From 1200 To The Present* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

[70] G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet And The Lunatics* (1929; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson, 1962), pp. 139-140.

meaningless to speak of evil if there is no good to which it is contrasted."[71] However, while Chesterton's position bordered on dualism, he ultimately rejected it quite categorically.[72] Such a position involves a perilous balance, which C.S. Lewis sought to explain:

> ...real Christianity (as distinct from Christianity-and-water) goes much nearer to Dualism than people think. One of the things that surprised me when I first read the New Testament seriously was that it was always talking about a Dark Power in the universe – a mighty spirit who was held to be behind death, and disease, and sin. The difference is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God, and was good when he was created, and went wrong. Christianity agrees with dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel.[73]

A study of Chesterton clearly reveals his rejection of dualism. His book on Aquinas devotes a whole chapter to the 'Angelic Doctor's' attack on Manichean thought (which, as I noted earlier, was dualistic). Chesterton even went as far as to say that this was the primary aim of Aquinas: "But if we wanted to put in a picturesque and simplified form what he wanted for the world...we might well say that it really was to strike a blow and settle the Manichees."[74] Explaining the way in which the Manichees believed that evil was rooted in nature, Chesterton says that, "it was a dualism, which made evil an equal partner with good..."[75] Chesterton believed that the pessimism of his age, against which he reacted so strongly, was a result of Manichean dualism that considered life to be essentially bad. Chesterton wanted to remind people that when Genesis declared, "God looked on all things and saw that they were good,"[76] it was advocating, "the thesis that there are no bad things; but only bad uses of things".[77] Chesterton recognised that if evil was part and parcel of nature, pessimism would seem to be the logical conclusion. Quentin Lauer explains the connection: "Nor does it solve anything to say

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[71] Quentin Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher Without Portfolio*, p. 79.

[72] This point will be illustrated during my discussion of the traditional grotesque in chapter five.

[73] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr. London: Fontana Books, 1964), p. 47.

[74] Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 118.

[75] *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 125. (Chesterton's paraphrase of Genesis 1: 31.)

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 125.

that evil is simply an inevitable concomitant of existence: that eliminates the possibility of doing anything about it, and is eventually a surrender to pessimism."[78]

Chesterton's rejection of dualism is even more apparent in his discussion of Robert Louis Stevenson's story, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Commenting on this story, Chesterton makes the following statement: "The real stab of the story is not in the discovery that the one man is two men; but in the discovery that the two men are one man. After all the diverse wandering and warring of those two incompatible beings, there was still only one man born and only one man buried."[79] This observation unequivocally rejects a dualistic interpretation of the story. Chesterton argued that the story was not about the battle between two independent forces of good and evil: "The reason is that there can never be equality between the evil and the good. Jekyll and Hyde are not twin brothers."[80] In "The Duel Of Dr Hirsch", Chesterton borrows from Stevenson's tale and takes the opportunity to make a similar point against dualism. In the story, two men appear to challenge one another to a duel, but Father Brown ultimately discovers that the two men are in fact one man. He explains what led him to his discovery: "These opposites won't do. They don't work…Things made so opposite are things that cannot quarrel."[81] Chesterton's argument here needs some amplification. Father Brown spots that the two men are one man because they are too opposite. He explains that it is too unlikely that two things can be so completely opposite. This is Chesterton's position on dualism. Any attempt to break the universe down into good and bad is a dichotomy that does not agree with our everyday experience. Many things are not that clear-cut. In the words of Father Brown, it simply "does not work", because reality cannot be broken down so neatly.

A further example of Chesterton's rejection of dualism can be seen in the methodology of Father Brown, which I referred to earlier. Father Brown's ability to catch evil criminals is not due to his inherent goodness. Rather, he is able to catch the criminals,

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[78] Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher Without Portfolio*, p. 101.

[79] G.K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1927), p. 72. See chapter five for further discussion on the doppelgänger motif present in this novella.

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 73.

[81] Chesterton, "The Duel Of Dr Hirsch", *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, p. 56.

because he recognises something of their evil within himself. He realises, to quote the apostle Paul, that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."[82] This is the whole basis of the Father Brown stories, and underlies Chesterton's rejection of dualism. Flambeau reinforces this in his confession to Grandison Chace:

> Have I not heard the sermons of the righteous and seen the cold stare of the respectable; have I not been lectured in the lofty and distant style, asked how it was possible for anyone to fall so low, told that no decent person could ever have dreamed of such depravity? Do you think all that ever did anything but make me laugh? Only my friend told me that he knew exactly why I stole; and I have never stolen since.[83]

A dualist would portray Father Brown as the complete opposite of Flambeau. Instead Father Brown shares Flambeau's fallen nature, and can identify with him. This enables him to rescue Flambeau from his life of crime. At the root of Chesterton's argument against dualism is the simple empirical fact that there is good and bad in every human being. This is one of the morals of "The Man In The Passage", where Father Brown describes a figure who looks like the devil, and then admits that he is talking about himself.[84]

Chesterton & The Illusion Of Evil

Chesterton also rejected all forms of Monism with its belief that all is one, and therefore, that evil is only an illusion. He believed that much of the new wave of superficial optimism that surrounded him was the result of Monism. One monistic group of the time was Christian Science. Chesterton's complaint with Christian Science was that it, "denies the actual reality of evil in experience."[85] As this quotation indicates, Chesterton knew that evil was an integral part of our experience, and could not therefore be denied. Writing on Robert Browning he declared: "If you had gone to

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[82] Romans 3:23 (New International Version).

[83] Chesterton, "The Secret Of Flambeau", *The Secret of Father Brown*, p. 175.

[84] Chesterton, "The Man In The Passage", *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, pp. 72-3.

[85] G.K. Chesterton, "On Optimism and Scepticism", *All is Grist* (1931; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1942), p. 177.

Robert Browning with the definite and deliberate doctrine, 'There is no pain or evil', he would certainly have classed you among the maniacs."[86]

Father Brown encounters a similar version of monism in, "The Eye of Apollo". In the original introduction to the story (which was later edited out), Chesterton describes the new religion of Apollo as, "one of the many new religions of the twentieth century that taught a superior innocence of sin and pain..."[87] Elsewhere in the story, Flambeau makes a similar remark, describing the religion of Apollo as, "one of those new religions that forgives your sins by saying that you never had any."[88] The way in which this idea falls short of our everyday experience is powerfully illustrated in the story. Introducing a central character, Chesterton writes: "For Pauline Stacey had nothing to say to tragedy; she was understood to deny its existence"[89] Only a few pages later Pauline Stacey is found dead, having been cruelly murdered: "For the last four minutes Flambeau had looked down on it; had seen the brained and bleeding figure of that beautiful woman who denied the existence of tragedy."[90] Chesterton knew that the reality of evil was an undeniable fact for any sane human being.

The reality of evil was a central tenet in Chesterton's stories: before Father Brown could solve the crimes he encountered, the crimes had first to be committed. Thus for Chesterton and Father Brown, the reality of evil was inescapable, a fact which is symbolised by his story, "The Invisible Man". In this story, a crime appears to have been committed; only there is no sign of either the victim or the murderer. A number of independent witnesses confirm that these are the facts of the case. Yet Father Brown does not accept invisible crimes and invisible murders; and so he searches for, and eventually finds, the solution. The murderer is real, only he is too obvious to have been noticed by anyone. Father Brown's belief in the reality of evil was so deeply rooted, that he clung to it even when others began to doubt it.

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[86] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

[87] Quoted by Martin Gardener in his annotated notes to Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 215.

[88] Chesterton, "The Eye of Apollo", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 198.

[89] *Ibid.*, p. 200.

[90] *Ibid.*, p. 205.

The horrific nature of many of the crimes in the Father Brown stories makes it clear that Chesterton did not wish to ignore the reality of evil in the world. In Father Brown we read of the general who tries to send eight hundred men to their death to cover his own crime ("The Sign Of The Broken Sword"); the lawyer who swindles, ruins and then murders one of his clients ("The Green Man"); and the prophet who commits, "one of the most brutal and brilliant murders in human history."[91] The catalogue of horrors is practically endless. This has almost proved too much for the sensibility of some Chesterton critics, such as Christopher Hollis. Hollis thinks that the plot of "The Secret Garden" suggests a morbid streak in Chesterton that was only later held in check by his conversion to Roman Catholicism.[92] He seems to forget that Chesterton included horrific evils in his stories, because they were an inescapable part of life. This was Chesterton's defence of fairy stories: "...fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already...What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey."[93]

Chesterton & Privation

"The Dagger With Wings" provides us with perhaps the most clear-cut example of Chesterton's views on evil as a privation. In this story Father Brown makes the following observation, in line with traditional Roman Catholic teaching on the nature of evil: "All things are from God; and above all, reason and imagination and the great gifts of the mind. They are good in themselves; and we must not altogether forget their origin even in their perversion."[94] Although not a strict philosophical definition of privation, this quotation confirms that Chesterton accepted the idea of evil as a

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[91] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

[92] A point made by Martin Gardener in his notes to Chesterton *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 62.

[93] G.K. Chesterton, "The Red Angel", *Tremendous Trifles* (1909; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1926), p. 102.

[94] G.K. Chesterton, "The Dagger With Wings", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, (1926; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1958) p. 142. In a recent introduction to a collection of Father Brown stories, W.W. Robson points out that Chesterton revised this story a number of times, which was unusual. This leads Robson to conclude that the story is pivotal to the cannon of Father Brown stories. See W.W. Robson, "Introduction" to G.K. Chesterton, *Father Brown: A Selection* (Oxford: World's Classics, 1995), p. 543.

privation. It explains that evil is not a substance in itself, but that it is a corruption of that which is good.

Lauer explains that in Chesterton, "there quite definitely is a recognition that evil is not part and parcel of nature, even though imperfection is; if evil is to exist at all it has to be introduced by beings who are more than merely natural, beings who alone can in the moral sense be either good or evil..."[95] The idea of evil being introduced through sin is something that I will examine in chapters seven and eight when I deal with the question of why evil exists. However, for now it is sufficient to note that Chesterton saw evil as a perversion of goodness; something that links him into the privation tradition. Tsanoff acknowledges this when he explains Augustine's position on the privation of evil: "On a dozen fronts Augustine maintains this position: that which is called evil is really nothing but corruption, perversion of nature."[96]

The idea that evil is something that corrupts or perverts the good is an affirmation of evil's parasitic nature. Evil is, 'an ontological parasite'. In his discussion of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Chesterton explains this incisively. He writes: "After all, Jekyll created Hyde; Hyde would never have created Jekyll; he only destroyed Jekyll."[97] In himself, Mr Hyde has no ontological status. He can only exist as a part of Dr Jekyll, and his existence ultimately destroys Jekyll as it destroys the goodness that is necessary for his existence. As a parasite, evil will always corrupt and pervert the good. This is something that Lynette Hunter discusses in her study of Chesterton: "The most uncanny story of the book [*The Innocence of Father Brown*] "The Sins Of Prince Sardine" is based on the degeneration of one of Flambeau's original crimes into a 'copy' that makes it an evil travesty of the original."[98] The ability of evil to distort a good thing and make it bad, is something that Father Brown detests. He declares: "I always like a dog, as long as he isn't spelt backwards."[99]

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[95] Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher Without Portfolio*, p. 53.

[96] Radoslav A. Tsanoff, *The Nature of Evil* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 41.

[97] Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 73.

[98] Hunter, *G.K. Chesterton*, p. 142.

[99] Chesterton, "The Oracle of a Dog", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 50.

Chesterton used the idea of corruption extensively in his portrayal of evil.[100] Evil is a corruptive parasite which threatens to do an increasing amount of damage as it perverts the goodness in a thing. Father Brown elucidates this idea in "The Sign Of The Broken Sword": "Anyhow, there is this about such evil, that it opens door after door in hell, and always into smaller and smaller chambers. This is the real case against crime, that a man does not become wilder and wilder, but only meaner and meaner."[101] This is the danger that Father Brown convinces Flambeau of, causing him to renounce his life of crime. Father Brown warns Flambeau: "I want you to give them back, Flambeau, and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honour in you; don't fancy they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. The road goes down and down."[102] There is an echo of Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*, in this warning: with every evil act, one becomes increasingly entrapped in evil.

When I discussed the idea of evil as a privation earlier on in this chapter, I observed that it was difficult for writers to imagine evil in this form because it was so abstract. One solution to this problem is the approach utilised by Chesterton when he talks about evil as an active corruption of a particular good. This has the effect of presenting us with a concrete image. Sister Mary Edwin DeCoursey alludes to this in her discussion of privation. She states: "In itself privation is nothing real…But because it contravenes a reality, i.e., a due perfection, existing or potential, and because it has an exigency for specific subjects which are real beings, privation is more than simple non-being. *It has definite, malevolent ties with reality; it is the absence that is conspicuous*."[103] [Italics mine]

Although evil as an active corruption helps to embody the concept of privation, it does not solve Milton's predicament of how to portray Satan and other evil beings. The problem revolves around the impossibility of a totally evil being. John Hick explains

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[100] The main technique that Chesterton uses to do this is the grotesque. See chapters four, five and six.

[101] Chesterton, "The Sign of the Broken Sword", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 231.

[102] Chesterton, "The Flying Stars", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 99.

[103] Sister Mary Edwin DeCoursey, *The Theory of Evil in the Metaphysics of St Thomas and its Contemporary Significance* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Of America Press, 1948), p. 34.

the position of Aquinas on this matter: "Since there cannot be a defect except within something good, it follows that there cannot be a purely evil being."[104] As we saw earlier on, this is a problem for Milton in his attempt to portray Satan. Chesterton manages to side-step this problem in the Father Brown stories by not creating a figure who is consistently on the side of evil. Early on in the first collection of stories (*The Innocence of Father Brown*), the arch-criminal, Flambeau, is redeemed. This is possibly because Chesterton realised that any attempt to copy Conan Doyle's Professor Moriarty[105] would either contradict his idea of evil as privation, or it would result in a character with whom it was too easy to sympathise and admire. Instead, the Father Brown stories contain criminals that are always redeemable. Not all of them are redeemed, but that possibility always exists. One example can be seen in the Anglican priest in "Hammer of God". Father Brown confronts him, accuses him and then hears his confession. The criminal is left to decide what he must do. When he then gives himself up, there is a sense in which he is redeemed.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have begun my study of Chesterton's theology of evil by going back to first principles. The question 'what is evil' is as necessary as it is difficult. It is one of the many questions that Chesterton addressed himself to. In this respect, he bears a marked resemblance to Father Brown, who, "could not help, even unconsciously, asking himself all the questions that there were to be asked, and answering as many of them as he could…"[106]

Chesterton did not believe that the theory of privation offered a complete, watertight explanation of evil. However, he did believe that it was a better explanation than any of the alternatives; none of which matched up to our experience of the world:

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[104] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 94.

[105] The arch-enemy of Sherlock Holmes.

[106] Chesterton, "The Salad Of Colonel Cray", *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, pp. 157-8.

> It is easy enough to make a plan of life of which the background is black, as the pessimists do... And it is easy enough to make another plan on white paper, as the Christian Scientists do...Lastly, it is easiest of all, perhaps, to say as the dualists do, that life is like a chess-board in which the two are equal...But every man feels in his heart that none of these three paper plans is like life...[107]

Chesterton believed that privation offered the best description of the nature of evil. At the same time, he was acutely aware of the difficulties involved in depicting such an abstract concept. Understanding privation as an active corruption or perversion of the good went some way towards helping Chesterton overcome this problem, although it did not provide a comprehensive solution. In the three chapters that follow, I will examine the primary technique that Chesterton adopted to enable him to depict evil within his fiction, a technique known as the grotesque.

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[107] G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925; repr. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 244.

Chapter 4: Understanding the Grotesque

Having established the way in which Chesterton understood the nature of evil, it is appropriate to move on to consider the depiction of evil in Chesterton's fiction. As we do so, an important question arises: What particular images of evil are we looking for? Are we looking for wicked characters, perverse morality, or simply terrifying atmospheres? One writer on the subject of the grotesque states that, "the grotesque is repeatedly associated with gross unnatural distortions and calls to mind the fearful, the unearthly, the nightmarish, and the demonic."[1] Similarly, the very title of Howard Daniel's book, *Devils, Monsters and Nightmares: An Introduction to the Grotesque and Fantastic in Art*,[2] emphasises the association between evil and the grotesque.

The association between evil and the grotesque is further suggested by the relationship that exists between gothic literature and the grotesque. In many respects, the gothic novel is seen as the epitome of the presentation of evil: its intention being to express, "an atmosphere dank with chilling horror or terror, a setting drawn from the darkest aspects of nature, shrouded in gloom and hung with the heavy tapestries of supernatural dangers."[3] A number of writers have discussed the relationship between the grotesque and the gothic,[4] including Michael Hollington in his study on Dickens: "Moreover, reciprocally as it were, the grotesque figures prominently in Gothic fiction, both as a general atmosphere (a 1786 reviewer of *Varthek* praised the novel for possessing 'the sombrous grotesque of Dante') and as a term of approbation for pleasing effects..."[5] One image common to both genres is that of the skeleton, as Maximillian Novak notes:

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[1] John R. Clark, *The Modern Satiric Grotesque* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), p. 19.

[2] Howard Daniel, *Devils, Monsters and Nightmares: An Introduction to the Grotesque and Fantastic in Art* (London: Abelard-Schuman Ltd, 1964).

[3] Robert Donald Spector, *The English Gothic: A Bibliographic Guide to Writers from Horace Walpole to Mary Shelley* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. 5. The way in which gothic literature evolved in the nineteenth century is a subject that I discuss in the next chapter.

[4] See Margot Northey, The Haunted Wilderness: *The Gothic and the Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) and Maximillian E. Novak, "Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque", *Novel* 13 (Fall, 1979).

[5] Michael Hollington, *Dickens and the Grotesque* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 23. On the same page, Hollington notes that: "The taste for the grotesque and the taste for the Gothic were very much intertwined in the late 18th and early 19th centuries..."

"The skeleton with its combination of deathly terror and horrible grin is the essence of the grotesque and the essence of the Gothic."[6] Chesterton discussed the image in an essay entitled "A Defence of Skeletons", which can be found in *The Defendant* (1901).[7]

The grotesque is prevalent in Chesterton, as Karen Youngberg reminds us: "[Chesterton's] fictions often impose on the commonplace world of London grotesque improbabilities which give to his fantasies the flavour of a wild and terrible dream or mad joke."[8] In view of the association between evil and the grotesque, Chesterton's interest in the grotesque provides an ideal means of examining the way in which he depicts evil in his fiction. Chesterton's use of the grotesque is not an area to which critics have paid much attention.[9] Two of the most significant exceptions to this are the three pages in Arthur Clayborough's book on the grotesque which are devoted to Chesterton; and the chapter in John Coates' study of Chesterton that also looks at this subject.[10]

This chapter, the first of three addressing Chesterton and the grotesque, will begin by exploring Chesterton's concept of the grotesque. The two chapters that follow will look at the source of the grotesqueries he uses, and relate them to his understanding of evil. By necessity, this chapter will take a more theoretical approach to the grotesque, whereas the two subsequent chapters will focus on Chesterton's fiction and its relation to the wider tradition of the grotesque in literature.

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[6] Novak, "Gothic Fiction and the Grotesque", p. 51.

[7] Also see Chesterton's poem from the 1890's, "The Skeleton".

[8] Karen Youngberg, "Job and the Gargoyles: A Study of *The Man who was Thursday*", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 2 No. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1976), p. 240.

[9] As I have already noted in my introduction, Rudolf Matthius Fabritius refers to the grotesque in his book, *Das Komische im Erzählwerk G.K. Chestertons* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1964). However, this does not constitute a discussion of the grotesque, because Fabritius is merely using the grotesque as another term for the comic: "The separation of the comic from the grotesque is superfluous since Chesterton's terminology and method of portrayal resist such a distinction." (p. 211.)

[10] See Arthur Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). pp. 58-60. & John Coates, "Chapter 8: A True Sense of the Grotesque", *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984). The chapter in John Coates' book is a modified form of an earlier article entitled: "The Return to Hugo, A Discussion of the Intellectual Context of Chesterton's View of the Grotesque" in *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* Vol. 25 No. 2 (1982).

In this chapter I want to look at the way in which Chesterton understood the grotesque. Before doing so, I will explain more precisely what I mean by the term 'grotesque' and provide a working definition of it. Having done this, I will explore the cultural context in which Chesterton formulated his own conception of the grotesque. This will lay the foundation for examining the way in which Chesterton understood the grotesque within the doctrine of creation and the way in which he sought to respond to the evil it depicted through humour.

The Meaning Of The Grotesque

The word 'grotesque' derives from the Latin word for the Ancient Roman 'grottas' that were discovered in the fifteenth century, in which remnants from Nero's 'Golden house' were discovered and excavated. The murals that were found mixed floral decoration with bits of mythical animals and human appendages. This distinctive style provided the basis for the word grotesque, which gradually made the transition from art into literature. As Mikhail Bakhtin explained about these murals: "They impressed the connoisseurs by the extremely fanciful, free and playful treatment of plant, animal and human forms. These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed."[11]

Although this fusion of separate elements in nature can be semantically traced to Ancient Rome, its true origins are even older. Wolfgang Kayser writes: "It was soon discovered that this style was by no means native to the Romans but had reached Italy as a new fashion relatively late..."[12] Similar examples of grotesqueries to those found in the grottas also appear to have been present in both early Egypt,[13] and ancient

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[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. Helene Iswolsky, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 32.

[12] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (1957; trans. Ulrich Weisstein, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 19-20.

[13] Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (1865; repr. London: Chatto & Windus, 1875), p. 3.

Greece.[14] Fritz Gysin concludes: "Whereas the term merely dates back to the sixteenth century and was not even applied to literature until the eighteenth century, the phenomenon itself is much older; Aristophanes uses grotesque elements in the Greek theatre, Vitruvius attests its existence in Augustan art, and, in English literature, grotesque figures have been found already in *Piers Plowman* and in the *Canterbury Tales*."[15]

In more recent years, explanations and interpretations of the grotesque have utilised different approaches. While critics such as Mikhail Bakhtin have taken a sociological slant, others, such as Wolfgang Kayser, have favoured a more psychological approach. Both Kayser and Bakhtin have come to be regarded as seminal thinkers in the area of the grotesque, despite the fact that they disagree on a number of points. Indeed, Bakhtin's book was written partly as a response to Kayser's work on the grotesque. Their central debate has focused on whether the grotesque is primarily an expression of comedy, or terror.

Earlier writers on the grotesque noticed the presence of comedy and terror. Notable in this regard are Victor Hugo (1802-85) and John Ruskin (1819-1900), two important nineteenth-century commentators on the grotesque. Hugo wrote: "In modern creations, on the other hand, the grotesque plays an enormous part. It is to be found everywhere; on the one hand it creates the deformed and the horrible; on the other hand, the comic, the buffoon."[16] John Ruskin made a similar observation in *The Stones of Venice*: "...it

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 10. Victor Hugo also noticed the presence of the grotesque in ancient Greece in his "Preface to Cromwell", *The Dramas of Victor Hugo* Vol. 8 (Trans. I.C. Burnham, London: H.S. Nichols, 1896), p. 14.

[15] Fritz Gysin, *The Grotesque in American Negro Fiction* (Switzerland: Francke Verlag Bern, 1975), pp. 22-3.

[16] Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell", p. 14. John Coates emphasises the importance of Hugo's contribution to the grotesque in his article, "The Return to Hugo, A Discussion of the Intellectual Context of Chesterton's View of the Grotesque". The importance of Hugo's extended "Preface to Cromwell", is also noted by Dieter Meindl in his discussion of the history of the grotesque: "The outstanding French contribution is Victor Hugo's preface to his 1827 play *Cromwell*.", *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996), p. 13. In a similar vein are the comments made by Donald Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 229.

seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful…"[17]

While Bakhtin has emphasised the ludicrous side of the grotesque, Kayser has emphasised the fearful element. Towards the end of his book, Kayser explains the nature of the grotesque by using three categories that reveal his bent towards the element of terror. These are: (1) The Grotesque is the estranged world (in which we are aliens, unable to orientate ourselves); (2) The Grotesque is a play with the absurd (although he says it is a dangerous game); and (3) The Grotesque is an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world.[18] All three categories discuss the grotesque in terms of the fearful world that surrounds us. Thus Kayser tell us: "Laughter originates on the comic and caricatural fringe of the grotesque."[19] In sharp contrast to this approach, Bakhtin argues that the grotesque is primarily comic: "However, the most important transformation of Romantic grotesque [from the Medieval and Renaissance] was that of the principle of laughter. This element of course remained, since no grotesque, even the most timid, is conceivable in the atmosphere of absolute seriousness. But laughter was cut down to cold humour, irony, sarcasm. It ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity."[20] The way in which this comic emphasis practically ignores the element of terror is freely admitted by Bakhtin in his discussion of the medieval depictions of the Devil. Bakhtin declares: "There is nothing terrifying or alien in him."[21]

In many respects, the debate between Kayser and Bakhtin as to whether the grotesque is primarily ludicrous, or fearful, revolves around the historical periods that they focus on. Kayser's interest centres on the Romantic and Modern era, whereas Bakhtin focuses his study on the Medieval and Renaissance period. Bakhtin admits that the different periods they cover determine the way in which they conceive of the grotesque:

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[17] John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. 3 (1853; repr. London: George Allen, 1900), pp. 124-5.

[18] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, pp. 179-189.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[20] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 37-8.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 41. It is interesting to note that Thomas Wright made a similar comment a century earlier in his book *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art*. He wrote: "The devils are droll but not frightful; they provoke laughter, or at least excite a smile, but they create no horror." (p. 73.)

"The images of the Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their readers with this fear..." He continues: "On the other hand, the medieval and Renaissance folk culture...turned [terror] into something gay and comic."[22] The problem of interpreting the grotesque through a particular historical lens is one that Frances Barasch has recognised and commented upon: "Modern uses of 'grotesque' differ remarkably from each other because the critics employing them have in mind separate historical traditions for the use of the word."[23]

Although the different approaches outlined cover important aspects of the grotesque, they still do not fully explain exactly what it is. Indeed, one critic has observed the way in which recent debate is indicative of the problem: "The Grotesque has been much written about in recent years, primarily because no one is exactly sure what it is."[24] When it comes to the subject of the grotesque, the problem of definition is actually quite acute: "...it seems to be one of those quickly cheapened terms which are used to express a considerable degree of emotional involvement without providing a qualitative distinction between the rather vague terms 'strange', 'incredible', 'unbelievable' – it is certainly not a well-defined category of scientific thinking."[25] In an attempt to explain this predicament, Geoffrey Harpham provides us with a helpful insight: "One reason for this confusion is that the grotesque is so omnipresent that nearly any theory at all can be supported by a judicious choice of examples."[26] Yet despite the omnipresence of the grotesque, and the resulting difficulties in defining it, there seems to be little problem in recognising the grotesque when it occurs. John Sykes, attempting to define the grotesque, reminds us that grotesqueries are not, "so unprecedented that we do not recognize them at all."[27]

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[22] *Ibid.*, p. 39. Once again, a similar comment on the comic use of the grotesque in the medieval period can be found in Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art*, p. 73.

[23] Frances K. Barasch, *The Grotesque: A Study in Meanings* (The Hague: Mouton & Co. 1971), p. 10.

[24] Kelly Anspaugh, "Jean Qui Rit and Jean Qui Pleure: James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and the High Modern Grotesque", in Michael Meyer, ed., *Literature and the Grotesque* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Perspectives on Modern Literature, 1995), p. 129.

[25] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 17.

[26] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. xviii.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

In his article on Chesterton, Patrick Keats declares: "Chesterton never gives a precise definition for the term 'grotesque', apparently believing that such an unruly subject resists definition..."[28] While it is true that Chesterton does not give us a precise definition, he makes some attempt at defining aspects of the grotesque. For this reason, it seems appropriate to begin this examination of Chesterton and the grotesque by trying to establish a working definition of what we are talking about. As Bernard McElroy has noted, such an attempt must recognise from the outset, "that the limits of definition of the word must be fairly flexible."[29]

In their attempts to define the grotesque, a number of critics have captured something of the essence of the grotesque. Geoffrey Harpham describes the grotesque as, "the sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together."[30] Though true, this remains too loose to become an effective definition. Margot Northey's attempt at further clarification leads her to state that, "the grotesque emphasizes incongruity, disorder, and deformity, and arises from the juxtaposition or clash of the ideal with the real, the psychic with the physical, or the concrete with the symbolic."[31] Once again, this definition though helpful, remains inadequate. It ignores the tension between comedy and terror that we have already seen to be so integral to the work of Kayser and Bakhtin. To establish a working definition that is both comprehensive and flexible, I wish to suggest three principles that govern the grotesque.

Firstly, the grotesque includes a *combination of comedy and terror*. As I noted earlier, this is an idea that can be traced back to writers such as Ruskin and Hugo.[32] The different emphasis' offered by Kayser and Bakhtin serve to illustrate that in fact, the grotesque involves *both* comedy *and* terror. It is this strange combination, in which the reader does not know whether to laugh or be horrified, that gives the grotesque so much of its particular style, and is responsible for its particular effect. Dieter Meindl writes:

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[28] Patrick H. Keats, "Chesterton, Browning and the Decadents", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 19 No. 2 (May, 1993), p. 184.

[29] Bernard McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), p. 2.

[30] Harpham, *On the Grotesque*, p. 11.

[31] Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness*, p. 7.

[32] This combination of comedy and terror goes back even earlier than Ruskin and Hugo if we take Gothic literature into account. See my discussion of Gothic literature in chapter five.

"There exists at present a certain consensus among literary critics and scholars regarding the essential nature of the grotesque. It is widely conceived as a combination of, or, rather, tension between, humour and horror, as provoking laughter and fear."[33]

Secondly, the grotesque includes a *combination of fantasy and reality*. Whether applied to character, situation, or atmosphere, the grotesque juxtaposes the fantastic in the context of the real. This aspect is carefully explained by Paula Uruburu: "The true Grotesque…distinguishes itself from the supernatural tale or horror story: its dependence upon reality; its characters move about in a world we accept or acknowledge as our own; its impact upon our emotions stems from its ability to successfully and realistically portray the eruption of the abnormal in our everyday lives."[34] Thus the grotesque is clearly distinct from genres such as fairy tales in which a secondary world is created that is intentionally distinct from our own.[35] As Philip Thomson puts it, "the grotesque derives at least some of its effect from being presented within a realistic framework, in a realistic way."[36]

Thirdly, the grotesque includes *physical distortion or exaggeration*. As we observed earlier, this was the style discovered in the excavated Roman 'grottas' that provided the semantic origin for the grotesque. In theorising about the grotesque, this element of the physical or visual can easily be lost, and yet it is an integral part of the grotesque. McElroy explains: "In literature, it exists in precisely those works that use language to evoke for the reader a vivid visual image which is perceived as grotesque".[37] The importance of the physical side of the grotesque is heavily emphasised by Bakhtin. Chapter five of his book, *Rabelais and His World*, is entitled "The Grotesque Image of the Body and its Sources".

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[33] Meindl, *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque*, p. 6.

[34] Paula M Uruburu, *The Gruesome Doorway: An Analysis of the American Grotesque* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 1.

[35] For a discussion of how fairy tales create a secondary world – the land of Faierie – see J.R.R. Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy Stories" (1947 – deriving from a lecture given at the University of St Andrews in 1938).

[36] Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1972), p. 8.

[37] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, p. ix. Also see Thomson, *The Grotesque*, p. 57.

Understanding The Grotesque – Chesterton's Contemporaries

Certain aspects of nineteenth century thought exerted a significant influence on Chesterton. This is why Leo Hetzler includes a section on the nineteenth century in his doctoral thesis on Chesterton: "In presenting an analysis of the thought contained in Chesterton's writings from 1900-1914, I should like to examine first his ideas and judgements on the nineteenth century, the age from which he and his generation were descended and against which they reacted."[38] Much of Chesterton's literary criticism was written about this period, including critical biographies of Stevenson, Dickens and Browning, as well as his study, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913). In addition, Chesterton's early career involved working at a publisher where he was required to read manuscripts written during the late Victorian period. In 1895 he began work at a small publishers called Redways.[39] After nine months he moved to the larger publishing firm, Fisher Unwin, where he remained until 1901. Michael Coren has noted in his biography, that Chesterton claimed to have read ten thousand volumes during this period, and challenged people to test him on it.[40] In view of this, it is reasonable to conclude that Chesterton was immersed in the literary culture of late Victorian England.[41]

The Victorian period, with which Chesterton was so well acquainted, was full of various aspects of the grotesque, and this undoubtedly influenced Chesterton's own

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[38] Leo Hetzler, *The Early Literary Career of G.K. Chesterton: His Literary Apprenticeship and an Analysis of his Thought, 1874-1914* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Cornell University, 1964), p. 132.

[39] Interestingly enough, Joseph Pearce notes in his recent biography of Chesterton, that Redways specialised in occultic literature, Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), pp. 35-6. The branch of the occult that Redways specialised in was spiritualism, which Chesterton was particularly wary of after experimenting with the ouija board during his youth. See G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), pp. 79-83.

[40] Michael Coren, *Gilbert, The Man who was G.K. Chesterton* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1989), p. 68. Coren goes on to say that when Chesterton was taken up on this challenge, he was invariably successful. A further reference to this is made by Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1944), p. 146.

[41] Two Chesterton critics address this relationship directly in separate monographs. A.M.A. Bogaerts, *Chesterton and the Victorian Age* (Holland: Hilversum, 1940) & Patrick Henry Keats, *G.K. Chesterton and the Victorians: Dialogue, Dialectic and Synthesis* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: The Catholic University of America, 1994). Keats introduces his thesis by explaining: "I will present in this dissertation the thesis that Chesterton's most original and significant contributions, both as a literary artist and critic, developed through his close connection with...the late Victorian period." (pp. 3-4.)

work. On a non-literary level, John Clark has pointed out that a hint of the grotesque even infiltrated Victorian architecture: "The Victorians were placidly fond of garish furniture, elaborate and wildly ornate lamps and screens and wallpaper, or of sofas whose arms and legs were transmogrified into eagle's talons, elaborate vines, or lion's claws."[42] One of the other, more popular, ways in which the grotesque entered Victorian culture was through their interest and obsession with freaks and freak shows. This is the subject of Martin Howard's book, *Victorian Grotesque*. Chesterton experienced something of the Victorian interest in freaks at first hand. In his younger years, many of his fellow schoolboys regarded him as an oddity or freak. Michael Coren describes his period at Colet Court Preparatory School: "At gym class the rest of the boys would break from their frenzied activities to watch Gilbert fail to jump over the exercise horse, or make no headway on the climbing frame."[43] When Chesterton first moved to St Paul's, little had changed. He was extremely tall for his age, had little physical agility, and spoke with a high pitched voice.

The grotesque can also be found in the work of various nineteenth-century writers; many of whom Chesterton was well acquainted with. One of these was H.G. Wells, who began writing during the late nineteenth century, and subsequently became a contemporary and friend of Chesterton. In thinking about the grotesque, his book *The Invisible Man* is particularly relevant. Many people forget that the full title of this book, published in 1897, was *The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance*. Discussing its treatment of the grotesque, Bruce Beiderwell reminds us of the importance of the subtitle: "A tension between play and terror, along with a resistance to the full recognition of them functions as the central technique in *The Invisible Man*."[44]

Robert Browning was another nineteenth-century writer with a fondness for the grotesque – a point highlighted by Chesterton in his book on Browning. Upon publication of Chesterton's study, one reviewer observed that Chesterton shared Browning's liking for grotesqueries. "What, then, is this idiosyncratic insolence of

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[42] Clark, *The Modern Satiric Grotesque*, p. 25.

[43] Coren, *Gilbert: The Man who was G.K. Chesterton*, p. 22.

[44] Bruce Beiderwell, "The Grotesque in Well's *The Invisible Man*", *Extrapolation* Vol. 24 No. 4 (1983), p. 302. I discuss Wells' novel further in chapter six of the thesis.

Browning which appeals to Mr Chesterton? It is, I think. his perception of that grotesque element in existence which is the true basis of optimism. Mr Chesterton's humour, like Browning's, is based on the cosmic incongruity which exists between the soul of man and the external universe..."[45] Chesterton's book on Browning constitutes his most sustained discussion of the grotesque. It provides the material for the discussion I referred to earlier by Arthur Clayborough on Chesterton and the grotesque. Chesterton's book, though typically full of generalisations and factual inaccuracies, became a key work on Browning, a point grudgingly admitted by Philip Drew: "...it is still probably the best single book to put into the hands of somebody who wishes to begin learning about Browning. That it should be so is no very flattering commentary on the Browning literature since 1903."[46] Chesterton's recognition of the grotesque in Browning has prompted other studies of Robert Browning which explore this aspect. In her thesis on Browning, Lilly Bess Campbell refers to Browning as the, "poet of the great grotesque".[47]

Chesterton was also attracted to Charles Dickens, a writer who is often associated with elements of the grotesque. Chesterton's studies include *Charles Dickens* (1906) and *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911). Dickens' interest in the grotesque has been examined in considerable depth by Michael Hollington, in his book, *Dickens and the Grotesque*.[48] Although Dickens is traditionally known as a realist, his novels also contain a hint of something bizarre and strange. Edgar Johnson was well aware of this when he exclaimed: "No writer so intimately fuses the familiar

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[45] James Douglas, "Personality in Literature", *The Bookman* (July 1903), quoted in Denis Conlon, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: The Critical Judgements – Part I 1900-1937* (Antwerp: Antwerp Studies in English Literature, 1976), p. 75.

[46] Philip Drew, *An Annotated Critical Bibliography of Robert Browning* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 20.

[47] Lilly Bess Campbell, *The Grotesque in the Poetry of Robert Browning* (Masters thesis, published in the *Bulletin of the University of Texas* No. 92, 1907), p. 17. Another, more comprehensive thesis on Browning and the grotesque is A. Bandyopadhyay, *The Grotesque in Browning's Poetry with Special Reference to the Period 1855-1869* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Birbeck College, University of London, 1974-5). Bandyopadhyay considers Chesterton in his thesis, noting that: "The grotesque happened to be one of his favourite themes." (p. 116.)

[48] For further work on this subject, see D.S. Racadio, *The Comic, the Grotesque and the Uncanny in Charles Dickens* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of East Anglia, 1990) and D. P. Kelly, *Temporary Subversion: the Grotesque in the Novels of Charles Dickens* (University of Sheffield: Unpublished MPhil thesis, 1989). The subject of the grotesque is also raised throughout Mark Spilka's study, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation* (London: Denis Dobson, 1963).

and the strange as Dickens does."[49] Earlier I explained how the mix of the fantastic and the real was an essential component of the grotesque. In some respects, Dickens acts as a microcosm of the way in which the Victorian period mixed these two elements.[50] When I proceed to examine Chesterton's use of the grotesque in subsequent chapters, we shall see how this Victorian blend infiltrated much of what he wrote.

The subject of the grotesque in art and literature was a subject addressed by many of the Victorian Sages on different occasions.[51] For example, John Ruskin discussed the grotesque in the third volume of his work, *The Stones of Venice*, and John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) did the same in volume one of his work, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*. Indeed, the prevalence of the grotesque among these thinkers provides the basis for John Coates' analysis of Chesterton and the grotesque that I alluded to at the start of this chapter. At the beginning of his discussion, Coates outlines his plan to discuss Chesterton and the grotesque "within their intellectual context".[52]

Many of the Victorian Sages inherited a particular conception of beauty that derived from Ancient Greece, and made beauty synonymous with goodness. According to Chesterton, the Greek understanding of beauty was extremely narrow because of the way in which it rejected anything that was perceived to be either ugly or grotesque.[53] In an essay entitled "On Gargoyles", Chesterton suggested that the Greeks had idealised beauty, and used it to try and emulate God: "The old Greeks summoned godlike things to worship their god."[54] This worship of beauty in itself meant that the Greeks had no tolerance for anything that fell short of it, hence their dislike for the grotesque. The

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[49] Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* Vol. 1 (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1952), p. 22.

[50] The Victorian period combines fantastic works such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, with realists such as George Eliot. One example of an individual work that blends the fantastic and the real is Robert Louis Stevenson's novella, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

[51] The 'Victorian Sages' was the collective name given to key thinkers in nineteenth-century Britain. Examples of the Sages include Thomas Carlyle, Walter Pater, John Ruskin & Walter Bagehot.

[52] Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 171.

[53] It is important to note that Chesterton almost invariably uses the words 'ugly' and 'grotesque' interchangeably. I will follow this pattern in my use of both words throughout this chapter.

[54] G.K. Chesterton, "On Gargoyles", *Alarms and Discursions* (1910; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1924), p. 4.

continuing influence of this Greek aesthetic in Chesterton's era can be found in the writings of George Santayana (1863-1952) and John Addington Symonds. In defence of his aesthetic principle, Symonds conflates ethics and aesthetics when he writes: "At a certain point art must make the common cause with morality...If it repudiates this obligation, it errs against its own ideal of harmony, rhythm, repose, synthetic beauty. It introduces an element which we seek to subordinate in life..."[55] Chesterton's desire to repudiate this viewpoint can be clearly seen in his essay "A Defence of Ugly Things", where he declares: "The tyrants and deceivers of mankind in this matter have been the Greeks."[56]

By rejecting the ability of the grotesque to depict art or literature that was beautiful, the Victorian Sages ensured that the grotesque suffered a loss of status during the Victorian period.[57] John Coates explains that "Walter Bagehot...was unwilling...to grant it [the grotesque], except in theory, any significant stature."[58] A similar attitude to the grotesque can also be found in John Addington Symonds: "In Symonds' view it can have no originality and must be parasitic on the 'real' world."[59] According to Coates, even Ruskin effectively demotes the grotesque: "The grotesque impulse, for Ruskin, chiefly occupies a middle rank in the human temper between the perfect, and those either too morose, dull or exhausted to invent a jest."[60] It was in response to the Victorian Sages, albeit indirectly, that Chesterton defended the status of the grotesque. In an essay entitled "On Carols", Chesterton defended the status of the incongruous images within certain Christmas carols, by arguing that they required a considerable level of artistic skill. He stated: "It is the art of the grotesque; but many critics forget that the art of the grotesque is an art...The Mock Turtle may be a mixture of different

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[55] John Addington Symonds, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive* Vol. 1 (of 2) (London: Chapman & Hall, 1890), p. 251.

[56] Chesterton, "A Defence of Ugly Things", *The Defendant*, p. 114.

[57] John Coates suggests that Walter Pater was the one possible exception to this.

[58] Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 176.

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 175.

animals; but not a mixture of any animals or all animals…There must be a shape, a design, and a relation in fantastic form."[61]

As well as attacking the way in which the classicists and neo-classicists worshiped beauty, Chesterton attacked the decadents' worship of the grotesque. As Bernard McElroy tells us: "Decadence and the grotesque have long been at home in each other's company."[62] The decadence movement enjoyed the bizarre expression afforded it by the grotesque, and the association between the two became increasingly common in the 1890's:

> In an age that was both attracted to and repelled by the possible mutation and deformation of meaning, the grotesque naturally became a prevalent stylistic metaphor for fundamental metaphysical dislocation…Capitalism's erosion of the traditional structures of nineteenth-century society as well as an increased interest in prehistory, alchemy and the occult combined to make the Victorian fin de siècle fertile ground for fantastic and monstrous elements.[63]

One of the figures at the forefront of the decadent movement was Aubrey Beardsley (1872-98), a writer and illustrator who once commented to an interviewer: "I have one aim – the grotesque. If I am not grotesque, I am nothing."[64] Chesterton devoted a portion of his book on William Blake to a discussion of Beardsley's grotesque art.[65]

Chesterton believed that the decadents also had too narrow an aesthetic. Whereas the neo-classicists had made the mistake of making beauty synonymous with goodness, the decadents simply replaced beauty with ugliness. Chesterton thought that the decadents had begun to love the ugly for the sake of its ugliness. Their enjoyment of the ugly was not initially wrong, but it became wrong when they forgot that art was ultimately for the glory of God: "The modern realists [i.e. the decadents] summon all these million

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[61] G.K. Chesterton, "On Carols", *Generally Speaking* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1928), p. 168.

[62] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, p. 129.

[63] Chris Snodgrass, *Aubrey Beardsley: Dandy of the Grotesque* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 27.

[64] Recorded by Linda Gestner Zatlin in her book, *Beardsley Japonisme and the Perversion of the Victorian Ideal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 217.

[65] G.K. Chesterton, *William Blake* (1910; repr. London: Duckworth & Co Ltd, 1920), pp.189-96. For a more detailed discussion of Chesterton's interaction with the decadents, see chapter six.

creatures to worship their god; and then have no god for them to worship."[66] Without a God to worship, Chesterton thought that the decadents had begun to worship the ugly (or grotesque). In other words, the decadents had begun to derive ultimate meaning and value from the grotesque, rather than using it as a means to an end. One recent writer on decadence explains the aesthetic reversal that occurred: "Decadence, in short, amounts to a reformation of the aesthetic code whereby art brings forth its meaning. Christian and classical values are very much in the process of being rejected and replaced..."[67]

Although Chesterton rejected the philosophy of decadence, John Coates correctly observes that Chesterton shared a similar perspective to the decadents concerning the grotesque. "Chesterton's attitude to the grotesque involves, among much else, an attempt to recapture from the aesthetes and decadents their most defensible insight into the nature of art, the real value of unexpected combinations and their connection with energy."[68] Both Chesterton and the decadents saw the potential value of the grotesque. The difference was that Chesterton thought it valuable because he believed that the whole of existence was exciting, whereas the decadents liked the grotesque because they had grown tired of existence: "The decadents' fascination with the grotesque, then, proceeded from a fundamental pessimism which caused them to turn away from ordinary subjects, seeing these as dull and unworthy of artistic treatment. Hence they felt the need to seek out, or else to invent, bizarre and often perverse artistic subjects."[69] This is the crux of the difference between Chesterton and the decadents concerning the grotesque, and it explains how Chesterton could be so close to the decadent's position, and yet remain so far. When discussing the decadence of the Marquis De Sade, Chesterton made his revulsion of worshipping the grotesque clear: "...but the point is

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[66] Chesterton, "On Gargoyles", *Alarms and Discursions*, p. 4.

[67] David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 14.

[68] Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 183. Chesterton's relationship with the decadents is more ambivalent than is often assumed. See chapter six for more detail on this point.

[69] Keats, "Chesterton, Browning and the Decadents", p. 184.

that they did pursue evil; not pleasure, or excess of pleasure, or sex or sensuality, but evil."[70]

In his discussion of Chesterton and the grotesque, Coates concludes by suggesting that Chesterton's response to his intellectual context involved a return to the thought of Victor Hugo. Regardless of whether or not this is strictly true, it is clear that Chesterton defended the grotesque from many of the views held by his contemporaries. Although Chesterton recognised the association between evil and the grotesque, he also valued the grotesque, and did not see it as inherently evil. Nor did he see it as a form of second class art. At the same time, he did not follow the decadents in worshipping the grotesque *because* of its ugliness.

The Grotesque & Creation

"The grotesque is the natural expression of joy…When real human beings have real delights they tend to express them entirely in grotesques…"[71] Chesterton thus argues that the grotesque is a creative expression of joy. It is a process that he sees affirmed in one of the Gospel accounts: "When the street children shouted too loud, certain priggish disciples did begin to rebuke them in the name of good taste. He said: 'If these were silent the very stones would cry out.' With these words…He founded Gothic architecture."[72] Chesterton believed that as God had expressed his joy in creation through the grotesque, so too could man express his joy in grotesque art and literature. He argued that Nature's creative energy could not be contained in a narrow aesthetic sphere. Instead, it insisted on bursting out into grotesque creations. As a result, one purpose of the grotesque was to remind us that 'mere existence' is an exciting and wonderful thing.

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[70] Chesterton, "The Dangers of Necromancy", *The Common Man* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950) p. 95.

[71] G.K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911; repr. as *Chesterton on Dickens*, London: Everyman, 1992), p. 110.

[72] G.K. Chesterton, "The Tower", *Tremendous Trifles* (1909; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1926), p. 111.

Chesterton's understanding of the grotesque as an expression of the joy of existence immediately raises a difficulty. How are we to account for deformity? For example, did Chesterton really believe that a child born with three legs could be described as an expression of God's joy in creation? The answer to this question is clearly no, for, as we saw in the previous chapter, Chesterton was keen to affirm the reality of evil. This apparent contradiction can be reconciled when we look further at two different meanings that Chesterton ascribed to the term grotesque.

A distinction needs to be made between Chesterton's use of the grotesque as a description of that which is simply strange, and his use of the term as a way of describing something that is deformed or corrupt in some sense. Although he did not articulate this distinction, it is clearly implied in his writings. On a number of occasions, Chesterton talked about the grotesque as something that was aesthetically strange. In the "Ballade of the Grotesque", he repeatedly describes aspects of creation with the phrase: "The shape is decidedly queer."[73] On other occasions, his use of the grotesque refers to a corruption or deformity within something.[74] It is only in this second usage that the grotesque becomes a means of representing evil in some form, recognising John Ruskin's observation that, "it is not possible to express intense wickedness without some condition of degradation."[75] When Chesterton talks about the grotesque expressing the joy and wonder of existence, he means the grotesque in terms of the strange rather than the deformed.

In response to his interpretation of Greek aesthetics, Chesterton affirmed the strange as an element of existence that was just as valid as the beautiful. On occasion, he even argued that nature's greatest quality was its strange ugliness: "The highest and most valuable quality in nature is not her beauty, but her generous and defiant ugliness…This is the deepest, the oldest, the most wholesome and religious sense of the value of nature – the value which comes from her immense babyishness."[76] Implicit within all of this is the belief that nature itself is stranger than we might otherwise

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[73] G.K. Chesterton, *The Coloured Lands* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), pp. 114-5.

[74] Examples of this can be found in chapters five and six.

[75] Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, Vol. 3, p. 145.

[76] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, p. 48.

think. This idea is the main one that emerges from Chesterton's analysis of Browning and the grotesque. In using the grotesque, Browning mirrors nature which is itself strange; not rounded and beautiful. If, as Chesterton argues, nature is strange, then the grotesque actually involves, "a spontaneous intuition of the world".[77]

In his book on Robert Browning, Chesterton expounds his belief that the grotesque forcefully reminds us of the wonder of nature.[78] This particular perspective has been noted by other critics on the grotesque. Arthur Clayborough's discussion of Chesterton and the grotesque hinges on this concept: "The chief point of interest in Chesterton's remarks on the grotesque is the idea that the grotesque may be employed as a means of presenting the world in a new light without falsifying it."[79] In addition, Philip Thomson comments on how Chesterton saw, "that it may be a function of the grotesque to make us see the (real) world anew, from a fresh perspective which, though it be a strange and disturbing one, is nevertheless valid and realistic." Thomson goes on to note: "This is a notion which gains importance in the twentieth century..."[80] One of the reasons that it has gained importance in the twentieth century is that more and more critics have seen that the grotesque can be used to remind people forcefully of that which has been forgotten through familiarity. Whereas Chesterton wanted to remind people of the wonder of creation, Thomson notes how the grotesque can also remind us of our alienation in the world: "Something which is familiar and trusted is suddenly made strange and disturbing."[81] Carl Skrade has noted a similar technique of forceful remembrance in the work of Flannery O'Connor: "O'Connor uses the grotesque because of what she perceives to be the deafness of modern man to his own predicament: 'To the hard of hearing you shout; to the almost blind you draw large and startling figures.'"[82]

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[77] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, p. 184.

[78] G.K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (1903; repr. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1967), p. 151.

[79] Clayborough, *The Grotesque in English Literature*, p. 60.

[80] Thomson, *The Grotesque*, p. 17.

[81] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[82] Carl Skrade, *God and the Grotesque* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), p. 87.

In the period he wrote, Chesterton did not just believe that the strange *could* remind us of the wonder of the familiar; he believed that the strange was *required* to remind us of the wonder of the familiar. As we have already discussed, the decadents symbolised the way in which many moderns had simply grown tired of existence. In response to this, Chesterton used the grotesque to dislocate our weariness and familiarity with existence: "Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the 'wonders' of creation, but it has forgotten that a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible."[83] This is a similar idea to Hugo's belief in the ability of the grotesque to retain and restore a sense of wonder: "It does away with all thought of monotony."[84] Following on from this, McElroy offers the following insight into the grotesque: "It distorts or exaggerates the surface of reality in order to tell us a qualitative truth about it."[85]

Chesterton saw both the strange and the deformed within creation. He believed that the strange was part of God's original design, whereas the deformed was a result of human sin.[86] This can be seen in the distinction that he made between exaggeration and distortion, both techniques of the grotesque.[87] Chesterton argued that exaggeration merely develops a theme that is already found within existence: "In short, if one is really to exaggerate the truth, one must have some truth to exaggerate."[88] Elsewhere, Chesterton tells us: "In one sense truth alone can be exaggerated; nothing else can stand the strain."[89] In contrast, distortion involves a deficiency of some sort, which Chesterton found in the art of Aubrey Beardsley: "In Aubrey Beardsley the artistic thrill (and there is an artistic thrill) consists in the fact that the women are not quite

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[83] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, p. 69.

[84] Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell", p. 21.

[85] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, p. 5.

[86] For a further discussion of Chesterton's belief in original sin, see chapter seven.

[87] See Chesterton, *William Blake*, pp. 191-6.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

[89] Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (1906; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1943), p. 134.

women nor the men quite men. Blake has absolutely no trace of this morbidity of deficiency."[90]

While Chesterton is more comfortable with exaggeration and the strange than he is with the deformed and the deficient, he argued that poets had a moral responsibility to include both within their work: "Telling the truth about the terrible struggle of the human soul is surely a very elementary part of the ethics of honesty. If the characters are not wicked, the book is."[91] Both the strange and the deformed grotesque should be an integral part of the artist's creation because they are an integral part of the created order. This idea underlies Victor Hugo's defence of the grotesque:

> Christianity leads poetry into the paths of truth...It will feel that everything in creation is not *beautiful* from the standpoint of mankind, that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the misshapen beside the graceful, the grotesque beside the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light. It will ask itself if the restricted, relative reasoning of the artist ought to prevail over the infinite, absolute reasoning of the Creator; if it is for man to set God right...[92]

The grotesque is an integral part of reality, and thus an important technique for the artist who wishes to portray something of that reality. Indeed, Chesterton declared that: "There is no reason, within reason, why literature should not describe the demonic as well as the divine aspect of mystery or myth."[93] Chesterton was able to reconcile the grotesque with his optimism concerning existence because he believed that existence was essentially good – a theme that I will return to in my concluding chapter. This is not to suggest that our existence was without fault, or that deformity was good. Rather, the description of evil as a privation meant that any such deformity was contingent on creation. The grotesque can be seen as good news, because it reminds humanity in its

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[90] Chesterton, *William Blake*, pp. 195-6.

[91] G.K. Chesterton, "Tom Jones and Morality", *All Things Considered* (1908; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1937), p. 266. See my discussion of Chesterton's perception of the relationship between representation and morality in chapter two.

[92] Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell", p. 13.

[93] G.K. Chesterton, "Magic and Fantasy in Fiction", *Sidelights* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), p. 230.

fallen state that we are not what we were created to be: "To be able to recognise a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man..."[94]

Even in its deformity, the grotesque could not help alluding to the original value of creation. Chesterton made this observation in his introduction to *Barnaby Rudge*:

> And it is an interesting coincidence that here, in this book of *Barnaby Rudge*, there is a character meant to be wholly grotesque, who, nevertheless, expresses much of that element in Dickens which prevented him from being a true interpreter of the tired and sceptical aristocrat...
> ...Dickens was vulgar, was absurd, overdid everything, but he was alive.[95]

Within our fallen state, Chesterton saw that one benefit of the artist's use of the grotesque was its ability to stop mankind from becoming proud: "In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance...it was the idea of the degradation of men in the grinning ugliness of his structure that withered the juvenile insolence of beauty and pride. And in this it almost assuredly did more good than harm."[96]

In his essay, "An Introduction to the Grotesque: Theoretical and Theological Considerations", Wilson Yates introduces three theological categories that are helpful for understanding the grotesque: creation, the Fall, and redemption.[97] Central to Chesterton's understanding of the grotesque was an emphasis on the doctrine of creation. The wonder of creation expressed itself through both the strange and the beautiful. It is within this context that Chesterton understands the doctrine of the Fall, which he subsequently represents through the deformed grotesque. Even in our fallen state, we continue to see something of the goodness of creation. While it might be misleading to describe the grotesque in Chesterton as redemptive, there is clearly an element of response. Chesterton's use of the grotesque enabled him to represent evil while simultaneously diminishing its power.

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[94] Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1984). p. 44.

[95] Chesterton, *Chesterton on Dickens*, pp. 74-5

[96] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, p. 47.

[97] Wilson Yates, "An Introduction to the Grotesque; Theoretical and Theological Considerations" in James Luther Adams & Wilson Yates, ed., *The Grotesque in Art and Literature: Theological Reflections* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 50-68.

Using Humour To Overcome Terror In The Grotesque

Many critics have noticed the nightmarish quality in Chesterton's work. Jill Brown writes: "Out of the corners of his eyes, as it were, he continually caught glimpses of something terrifyingly alien, a world of uncanny evil."[98] Later on in the same article she states that, "any reader of Chesterton realises that his imagination was perpetually haunted."[99] Chesterton himself acknowledged the presence of the nightmare within parts of his own work:

> ...but I could at this time imagine the worst and wildest disproportions and distortions of more normal passion; the point is that the whole mood was overpowered and oppressed with a sort of congestion of imagination. As Bunyan, in his morbid period, described himself as prompted to utter blasphemies, I had an overpowering impulse to record or draw horrible ideas and images...[100]

The relationship between the nightmarish and the grotesque in Chesterton is one that John Coates denies. He argues: "What, perhaps, suggests that Chesterton's view of what Borges calls the 'nightmarish', related more to public literary debate than to private phobias, is the marked change of tone between his earlier and late views of the subject." Coates suggests that Chesterton's use of the grotesque has little to do with the morbid tendencies that Chesterton admitted to, and that we should simply interpret his use of the grotesque in terms of the contemporary literary debate. Although Coates' analysis of the contemporary literary context is extremely helpful, it is a mistake to ignore the link between the nightmare and the grotesque in Chesterton. Coates' argument depends on an apparent change that he identifies in the way that Chesterton used the grotesque. He explains that Chesterton's early depiction of existence as something wild and fantastic, was an attempt to defend the status of the grotesque, whereas, in later years, Chesterton began to use the grotesque to depict the mysteries of

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[98] Jill Brown, "'Unearthly Daylight': The Light and The Dark in Chesterton's Imagination", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 13 No. 1 (February 1987), p. 22.

[99] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[100] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 90. Similar sentiments regretting the morbidity that influenced periods of his life were expressed in a letter written to Ronald Knox in 1922. Of course, this was the year of Chesterton's conversion into the Catholic Church. See Evelyn Waugh, *The Life of Ronald Knox* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1959), pp. 207-8.

God. Thus he concludes that Chesterton's early work may resemble the nightmarish, but that this is the result of his attempt to defend the status of the grotesque against his contemporaries. To illustrate this alleged change in Chesterton's emphasis, Coates shows us how Chesterton's essay on the Book of Job (apparently written in 1929), differs from his earlier work. However, this argument is mistaken. Chesterton's essay on the Book of Job was actually written in 1907,[101] during the same period as his novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, which is generally recognised as his most nightmarish text. Therefore, we cannot argue that there is any significant change in Chesterton's use of the grotesque. Instead, we have to conclude that Chesterton had a wide-ranging rather than a changing perception of the grotesque, which included an intimate relationship with the nightmarish as well as an attempt to defend the status of the grotesque from his contemporaries.

Many critics have taken the opposite view to Coates; believing that Chesterton's continual inclusion of the grotesque and nightmarish represented a ghost that he never fully exorcised. For example, Jill Brown refers to: "The nightmare, which he controlled so carefully and only allowed to spurt out spasmodically in fearful shapes..."[102] The exact nature of this nightmarish strain in Chesterton is an area that I will look at in further detail in my chapter, 'Chesterton and the Modern Grotesque'. However, it is interesting to point out that there is clearly a sense in which Chesterton used the Thomistic belief in the primacy of goodness to help him exorcise this particular ghost.[103]

Whether or not Chesterton ever successfully exorcised the nightmarish from his thinking is secondary, at least for the purpose of this discussion. Of primary importance is the fact that he used the grotesque to help him try and exorcise it. This is an important function of the grotesque for Chesterton, and it is one that some of his critics have appeared unable to recognise. In particular, F.W. Brownlow seems to think that

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[101] This date of 1907 is taken from John Sullivan's comprehensive three volume bibliography on Chesterton. The same date is also given by Chesterton's principal biographer, Maisie Ward in the bibliography that she provides at the end of her biography of Chesterton.

[102] Brown, "'Unearthly Daylight': The Light and the Dark in Chesterton's Imagination", p. 26.

[103] This subject is one that I will return to in the concluding chapter.

Chesterton dealt with his nightmare by getting rid of the grotesque: "He became the prophet of the normal and the ordinary..."[104] This opinion is diametrically opposed to Chesterton's views on the grotesque that we have already looked at, and it is not supported by an analysis of his fiction (as we shall see in the next two chapters).

In an important essay entitled "The Nightmare", Chesterton explained how the grotesque used comedy to overcome the terror of evil:

> That is the stern condition laid upon all artists touching this luxury of fear. The terror must be fundamentally frivolous...Let such poets as the one I was reading in the garden, by all means, be free to imagine what outrageous deities and violent landscapes they like...But these huge gods, these high cities, are toys; they must never for an instant be allowed to be anything else.[105]

Chesterton pointed out that this approach had been utilised before: "It was the Christians who gave the Devil a grotesque and energetic outline, with sharp horns and spiked tail. It was the saints who drew Satan as comic and even lively."[106] For Chesterton, evil was a part of life, and could not be ignored. Earlier on we noted how Chesterton argued that artists and writers had a moral responsibility to depict both good and evil. At the same time, Chesterton wanted to subordinate evil and terror: "For there is nothing so delightful as a nightmare – when you know it is a nightmare."[107] Humour was the means by which he sought to do this.

Karen Youngberg has discussed the way in which Chesterton used the 'harlequin' image to describe himself: "This image which Chesterton seems to have held of himself as a kind of harlequin, a metaphysical jester capering through a nightmare of denial, labouring like Lear's Fool to outjest the howling storm, is a useful concept to apply to his fantasy fiction, for it suggests that levity and nonsense may be enlisted in the

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[104] F.W. Brownlow, "The Modernity of Chesterton's Browning Criticism", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 17 No. 2 (May 1991), p. 165.

[105] Chesterton, "The Nightmare", *Alarms and Discursions*, p. 11.

[106] G.K. Chesterton, "The Mystagogue", *A Miscellany of Men* (1912; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd. 1926), p. 146.

[107] Chesterton, "The Nightmare", *Alarms and Discursions*, p. 11.

service of the serious and profound."[108] Obviously the comic is something that is central to Chesterton's work, as well as to his own personality. Examples range from the comic songs of *The Flying Inn*, to the practical joke that Auberon Quin inaugurates in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. David Derus explains: "Only a passing acquaintance with Chesterton is needed to see how large this question of humour is in any appreciation of him as a figure of literature."[109] The style of Chesterton's humour is, of course, intimately related to his use of the grotesque. Derus goes on to allude to this: "It is at this point that he really gives his own *apologia* for treating serious subjects frivolously. By dislocating common-sense reality, we may realise fully the spiritual side of life..."[110] Chesterton himself made a similar point in an essay on laughter: "Anybody can make a child laugh by some single inversion or incongruity; such as putting spectacles on the teddy bear."[111]

Chesterton's use of the grotesque as a means of subverting evil and terror via the comic is an idea that is taken up by various other critics on the grotesque. Even Wolfgang Kayser, who as we saw earlier, emphasised the horror of the grotesque, acknowledged this function. Commenting on a lecture given by Kayser in 1964, Mark Spilka explains Kayser's position: "These strange effects rouse laughter, horror and perplexity in the observer, with laughter serving to diminish horror and perplexity, and so make the nightmare scene more bearable."[112] The ability of the comic to triumph over terror is more familiar in the work of Bakhtin. Typical of this is his following statement: "We

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[108] Youngberg, "Job and the Gargoyles: A Study of *The Man who was Thursday*", p. 241. Youngberg's use of the phrase 'metaphysical jester' is probably borrowed from William B. Furlong's study of Shaw and Chesterton, *Shaw and Chesterton: The Metaphysical Jesters* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970).

[109] David L. Derus, *The Literary Theory and Practice of G.K. Chesterton* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Yale University, 1961), p. 180. For a more detailed study of this aspect of Chesterton, see Michael Mason, *The Centre of Hilarity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1959). We might also note Stephen Medcalf's observation: "Perhaps the most convincing proof of Chesterton's own wisdom and even sanctity is his capacity for sheer humour." Stephen Medcalf "The Achievement of G.K. Chesterton" in John Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1974), p. 121.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 190.

[111] Chesterton, "Laughter", *The Common Man*, p. 156.

[112] Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation* (London: Denis Dobson, 1963), p. 64. However, as we discussed earlier on, Kayser tends to diminish the comic in the grotesque. Hence other critics have qualified the way that Kayser uses the comic to dispel fear: "...though he feels that the demonic may be exorcised through laughter, he is rather vague as to how this is to take place." In Lee Byron Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose* (California: University of California Publications in Modern Philology Vol. 71, 1963), p. 6.

have already shown that the Medieval and Renaissance grotesque, filled with the spirit of carnival, liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying..."[113] Following on from this, Spilka observes the same tendency in the work of Dickens and Kafka, for whom, "the grotesque became a way of mastering reality through comic means."[114] The idea that comedy can be used to dispel evil and terror also has a history outside of the confines of literature. Lee Byron Jennings notes that it finds confirmation in the cultural sphere: "It is interesting that this theory of the disarming of the demonic through humour finds confirmation in the sphere of cultural history. Stumpfl notes that the Germanic gods and demons were made into evil or ludicrous figures by the Church and that this gave rise to the parallel of fool and devil in popular plays."[115]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to provide a working definition of the grotesque, as well as demonstrating how Chesterton's interest in the grotesque was intrinsically related to his culture. In opposition to much of the contemporary thought of his day, Chesterton viewed the grotesque in a positive light. However, he was careful to distinguish the strange grotesque from the deformed grotesque, and to argue that it was only the first that was intrinsically good. The strange was understood within the doctrine of creation, whereas the deformed had to be understood within the doctrine of the Fall, without forgetting that creation preceded the Fall: "Man is a monster. And he is all the more a monster because one part of him is perfect."[116] Following on from this, I examined the way in which Chesterton used the grotesque to help him overcome the evil that he encountered in the world through the use of comedy. As we observed, this

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[113] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, p. 47.

[114] Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*, pp. 64-5. The prevalence of this idea is noted by Ralph Ciancio who describes Spilka's theory as a, "commonly held perception" among critics of the grotesque. Ralph Ciancio, "Laughing in Pain", in Michael Meyer, ed., *Literature and the Grotesque*, p. 9.

[115] Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose*, p. 15.

[116] G.K. Chesterton, "Questions of Divorce", *The Uses of Diversity* (1920; repr. London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1937), p. 119.

function of the grotesque is one that other critics on the grotesque have recognised and expounded.

At the same time, the use of the grotesque to subvert terror is a potentially dangerous strategy. One reason for this is that the grotesque requires a fine balance between terror and comedy. Without this balance, the grotesque descends into farce, and terror is marginalised to the extent that the treatment of evil appears superficial. Jennings reminds us of the fine balance involved: "The grotesque presents the terrible in harmless guise, and its playfulness is constantly on the verge of collapsing and giving way to the concealed horror. Both aspects must be present in equal degree in a given object."[117] However, Wolfgang Kayser suggests that there are further dangers involved in the way that the grotesque seeks to play with terror: "It may begin in a gay and carefree manner…But it may also carry the player away, deprive him of his freedom, and make him afraid of the ghosts which he so frivolously invoked."[118] Chesterton was clearly aware of this danger, which is why he made his intention clear: "I will ride on the Nightmare; but she shall not ride on me."[119] Whether or not his attempt to control the grotesque in this manner was successful, is something that I will go on to consider in the two chapters that follow.

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[117] Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose*, p. 16.

[118] Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, p. 187.

[119] Chesterton, "The Nightmare", *Alarms and Discursions*, p. 13.

Chapter 5: The Traditional Grotesque

Chesterton once wrote: "The timidity of the child or the savage is entirely reasonable: they are alarmed at this world, because this world is a very alarming place."[1] In the previous chapter, I looked at the way in which Chesterton understood the grotesque as a means of expressing and controlling what could become an overwhelming sense of evil in the world. Chesterton declared: "I will ride on the Nightmare; but she shall not ride on me."[2] The question that I will look at in this chapter (and the next one), concerns the source of the nightmare that the grotesque seeks to express and control. As Lee Byron Jennings reminds us: "...the grotesque, through its terrible aspect, often serves as a focal point for everything that the author fears and abhors..."[3]

Paula Uruburu has suggested that, "the true Grotesque tends to become prominent in both art and literature when the safe and familiar world we know seems on the verge of disintegration..."[4] By looking at the main periods in which the grotesque genre has flourished, we can identify the source of the fear which the grotesque expresses, and discover exactly what it is that threatens to disintegrate our safe and familiar world.

Using a distinction suggested by Bernard McElroy, I intend to identify two types of grotesque that have been used to represent the dominant fears of society. The 'modern grotesque' is the subject of the next chapter. This chapter will look at what McElroy calls the 'traditional grotesque'. I will begin by outlining the distinction that McElroy makes between these two types of grotesque before going on to analyse the transformation that occurs from one to the other. Having laid this foundation, I will proceed to look at Chesterton's use of the traditional grotesque. Chesterton does not use

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[1] G.K. Chesterton, "The Red Angel", *Tremendous Trifles* (1909; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1926), p. 102.

[2] G.K. Chesterton, "The Nightmare", *Alarms and Discursions* (1910; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1924), p. 13.

[3] Lee Byron Jennings, *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose* (California: The University of California Press, 1963), p. 24.

[4] Paula M. Uruburu, *The Gruesome Doorway: An Analysis of the American Grotesque* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 15.

this form as much as one might expect, a point that will be explained and illustrated in the two sections that follow.

McElroy's Distinction[5]

In his book, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, Bernard McElroy establishes the context for his subsequent discussion of twentieth-century writers that use the grotesque. He distinguishes between the 'traditional grotesque' and the 'modern grotesque'. He explains:

> In earlier art, the source of the grotesque was usually the external realm, natural or supernatural. In societies where men felt themselves to be at the day to day mercy of potent, malevolent spiritual powers, the grotesque often embodied that which, though invisible, was presumed to exist. But in the modern Western world, deeply aware of the rift between the external, objective world and the internal, subjective interpretation of it, the source of the grotesque has moved inward and is found in the fears, guilts, fantasies, and aberrations of individual psychic life. The modern grotesque is internal, not infernal, and its originator is recognised as neither god nor devil but man himself.[6]

The traditional grotesque is based upon an external figure of evil, whereas the modern grotesque internalises evil. In the modern grotesque, evil is everywhere, because the universe is interpreted through this lens of terror. Not every instance of the grotesque can be categorised in this way, but McElroy is simply observing that Western man no longer believes in an external supernatural or preternatural realm where evil can be found in 'The Other'. When Western man did believe in such a realm, the grotesque reflected it accordingly: "In the Middle Ages, the demonic provided the material for one of the richest strains in the history of grotesque art, culminating in the fantastic

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[5] Bernard McElroy is one of the most important writers on the grotesque since Kayser and Bakhtin, especially in terms of the period in which Chesterton wrote. (See the previous chapter for more information on Kayser and Bakhtin). His book, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque* (1989) is one of the only books that looks at the grotesque within the broad context of twentieth-century modern fiction. Most of the other writers that have dealt with aspects of the twentieth-century grotesque have focused on particular authors (such as Flannery O'Connor), or on areas that are outside my sphere of interest (such as Southern American fiction). For this reason, it seems wholly appropriate to use McElroy's distinction as a framework for my analysis of Chesterton's use of the grotesque.

[6] Bernard McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), p. 21.

hellscapes of Hieronymus Bosch."[7] However, in the modern period, the philosophical belief in the supernatural realm has gradually been eroded. Modern man refuses to believe in the possibility of demons and monsters.

It is interesting to consider the original gothic writers in relation to this.[8] Their ambivalence towards the supernatural should not be confused with the attitude that McElroy finds so prevalent in modern man. Julia Briggs observes: "The Gothic novel had consisted of two distinct types, those stories that made free use of supernatural machinery, and those that aimed to appeal to both sensational and 'enlightened' elements in popular taste by providing a (more or less) rational explanation."[9] Even this second approach, which was favoured by writers such as Ann Radcliffe, still relied upon the possibility of the supernatural to achieve its effect. Without such a possibility, there would not have been the atmosphere of terror that we find in such stories. Frederick Frank has pointed out that despite their rational explanations, Ann Radcliffe's gothic novels still have, "real dangers".[10] This is clearly different from the internalised fear that McElroy finds in the modern grotesque: "Even in those novels which depict the external world as being grotesque itself, the emphasis is usually not so much upon man's predicament before a powerful and dehumanising world as upon the protagonist's inner reaction to that predicament. Irrational fears and primitive dreads are made actual; fantasies, delusions, and hallucinations often mingle freely with physical existence in the external world."[11] According to McElroy, the result of this internalisation is that: "The lowest common denominators of the modern grotesque are guilt and fear."[12]

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[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

[8] In using the term 'original gothic writers', I am referring to the period 1762-1830 (approximate) and writers such as Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, Horace Walpole and William Beckford.

[9] Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 143.

[10] Frederick S. Frank, "The Early Gothic, 1762-1824" in Neil Barron, ed., *Horror Literature; A Reader's Guide* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), p. 6.

[11] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, pp. 21-2.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

McElroy's identification of a difference between the traditional and modern grotesque is supported by other thinkers. Geoffrey Harpham acknowledges a similar distinction in his study of the grotesque when he discusses Dante, "writing in the golden age of the grotesque before it became self-conscious..."[13] Similarly, when Mikhail Bakhtin's discusses the difference between the comedy of the medieval grotesque, and the terror of the romantic and modern grotesque, he tells us that there is a different type of fear involved. The romantic and modern grotesque expresses a, "fear of the world", whereas the medieval and renaissance writers describe, "comic monsters".[14] These comments are also supported by the general recognition among critics on the supernatural in fiction, that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen an internalisation of supernatural fear.[15]

Analysing The Transformation

In his attempt to explain how the traditional grotesque changed into the modern grotesque, McElroy locates Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* as the turning point:

> To summarise then: in a variety of ways, *Notes from Underground* anticipates much twentieth-century fiction of the grotesque. A repugnant protagonist, aberrant by all 'normal' standards, is a humiliated man totally engrossed in a losing battle with his external environment, yet forced to concede that the world is right in judging him diseased and contemptible...There is an irrational feeling of guilt at the centre of human experience, guilt based not upon having done something but upon the generally loathsome nature of the individual...[16]

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[13] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 9.

[14] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965; trans. Helene Iswolsky, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 39.

[15] For an example of this, see Glen Cavaliero, "Chapter 7: The Enemy Within", *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). A more detailed analysis of the shift from external evil to an internalised terror can be found in Donald Baker, *Themes of Terror in Nineteenth-Century English Fiction: The Shift to the Internal* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Brown University, 1955).

[16] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, p. 28.

The way in which Dostoevsky prefigures the modern grotesque is also highlighted by Donald Fanger. Fanger explains that the only difference is the thread of a Christian framework that is present in Dostoevsky's work: "...Dostoevsky's grotesque world is linked to a traditional, Christian source of meaning by the slender thread of aspiration, whereas his spiritual descendants, breaking that thread, are left not with the aberrant (since there is nothing to aberr from), but with 'the absurd'."[17]

While Dostoevsky is clearly valuable in identifying the emergence of the modern grotesque, it is difficult to conceive of such a transformation being so clear-cut. McElroy seems to have some awareness of the difficulty: "It is not possible to say at precisely what point the modern grotesque detaches itself from the supernaturalism and Gothic tradition that permeates the mainstream of the nineteenth-century grotesque..."[18]

It could legitimately be argued that although the Gothics symbolise the external embodiment of evil, they also mark the beginning of the process of internalisation. This is largely due to their association with the Romantics: "In literature the word [gothic] refers to the kind of work, usually fiction, that developed during the later eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries out of the sentimental romance into the Dark Romantic tale of terror."[19] The Romantic movement reacted to the teaching of the Enlightenment

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[17] Donald Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 232-3. There are various references to Dostoevsky throughout this thesis, and it is interesting to reflect briefly upon Chesterton's relationship to this Russian writer. Despite a number of differences, the two writers share some important similarities, including: philosophical comment in their fiction; a commitment to the Christian faith; a fusion of romanticism and realism in their writing; and the use of the grotesque. These pieces of circumstantial evidence would encourage the idea that Chesterton was influenced in some manner by Dostoevsky. This seems even more likely in view of the fact that there was a surge of interest in Dostoevsky in England during the early twentieth century. However, the lack of direct references to Dostoevsky in Chesterton's writings make it difficult to prove this hypothesis. At the same time, the hypothesis finds some support from one of the few references to Dostoevsky that can be found in Chesterton's writings: "If it is to some extent true that we hear more of certain writers like Zola or Tolstoy than of greater writers like Barres and Dostoevsky, the reason is amusingly simple. It is because the opinions of Zola and Tolstoy happens to be the more fashionable opinions in the particular province of which we are provincials." G.K. Chesterton, "On the Unanimity of Opinion", *Illustrated London News* (1912; repr *G.K. Chesterton: The Collected Words Volume 29 – The Illustrated London News 1911-1913,* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), pp. 269-70.

[18] McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque*, p. 22.

[19] G.R. Thompson, "Introduction", Thompson, ed., *The Gothic Imagination: Essays in Dark Romanticism* (Washington: Washington State University Press, 1974), p. 1.

by focussing on individual experience and the internal self. This particular thread permeates the writing of the Gothics, and explains why Wolfgang Kayser links the romantics with the moderns when talking about the grotesque.[20] However. Kayser exaggerates the connection. Although this process of internalisation began to occur in the Gothic genre, it did not fully develop there. Evil continued to exist primarily in the external realm. Thus we have to admit that critics such as G.R. Thompson seem to import some of their own modern presuppositions into their analysis of Gothic literature. For example: "But the apprehension that there was a dark substratum to the rock of Romantic faith obsessed those Romantic writers who turned to the Gothic mode of terror and horror in an effort to express a complex vision of the existential agony confronting man since the Age of Faith."[21]

If the Gothics began the process of transforming the traditional grotesque into the modern grotesque, the nineteenth century shaped and developed it: "Because of its preoccupations with extraordinary extrapolations of guilt and with medically defined madness, the history of the horror story from 1825 to 1896 is very largely an account of growing introversion."[22]

Perhaps the most striking symbol of the internalisation of evil in nineteenth-century literature is that of the doppelgänger.[23] The term doppelgänger was first coined by the writer Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825) during the late eighteenth century in his novel *Siebenkas*. The doppelgänger was a key symbol for the Romantics; one that emerged during the nineteenth century: "The double is a central Romantic image. Its heyday corresponds approximately to the span of the nineteenth century, but its immediate literary roots are in late-eighteenth-century Romanticism..."[24] The same observation is

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[20] This point was established in the previous chapter when I examined the differences between Kayser and Bakhtin.

[21] Thompson, *The Gothic Imagination*, p. 5.

[22] Brian Stableford, "The Later Gothic Tradition, 1825-96", in Barron, ed., *Horror Literature: A Reader's Guide*, p. 61. This internalisation continues to develop at the beginning of the twentieth century. David Punter states that, "in *Turn of the Screw* and the stories of de la Mare, we can see Gothic fiction taking on a new psychological sophistication..." David Punter, *The Literature of Terror - Volume 2: The Modern Gothic*, 2nd edition (London: Longman Ltd, 1996), p. 67.

[23] 'Doppelgänger' is a German word which is usually translated as 'double'.

[24] John Herdman, *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990), preface, p. x.

made by C.F. Keppler when he explains the focus of his study on the literary double: "I have confined myself to European and American literature since the end of the eighteenth century; in other words to the period since the beginning of the Romantic Movement, a period which has been particularly rich in the production of Doubles."[25] The doppelgänger is clearly prevalent in nineteenth-century literature, in novels such as: James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824); Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Double* (1846); Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1891).[26] However, for Otto Rank, an early commentator on the doppelgänger: "Hoffman is the classical creator of the double-projection..."[27] (Hoffman is a figure that I will briefly return to later in this chapter when I consider the contribution of Sigmund Freud.)

Keppler's study of the doppelgänger associates it with evil. He devotes three chapters of his book to the 'evil' dimension of the second self.[28] Chesterton hints at a similar association through the evidence that Mr Raymond Percy gives to the court in *Manalive*: "Not from the stairs below, but along the passage from the inner bedchamber (which seemed somehow to make it more alarming), footsteps were coming nearer. I am quite unable to say what mystery, or monster, or double, I expected to see when the door was pushed open from within."[29] It is interesting to note what the doppelgänger tells us about the changing perception of evil. One of the most pivotal changes is that evil loses its ontological status, becoming more of an impression than anything substantial and existent. Gordon Hirsch acknowledges this in his article, "Frankenstein,

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[25] C.F. Keppler, *The Literature of the Second Self* (Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1972), preface, p. x.

[26] For a more detailed discussion of the role of the double in nineteenth-century fiction, see Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (New York: New York University Press, 1969).

[27] Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1914; trans. Harry Tucker, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 8-9.

[28] These are: "Chapter 3: The Second Self as Pursuer"; "Chapter 4: The Second Self as Tempter"; and "Chapter 5: The Second Self as Vision of Horror".

[29] G.K. Chesterton, *Manalive* (1912; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 140. I do not wish to suggest that Chesterton understood the doppelgänger as a purely evil figure. His comments on Stevenson's, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, reveal the way in which he understood the doppelgänger to be a device through which the connection between good and evil could be represented. (See my comments on this in chapter three.)

Detective Fiction, and Jekyll and Hyde": "The double in each book is repulsive, revolting; but in each book it is the *impression* that counts rather than any particularized physical description."[30] This change occurs as fear becomes a projection of the human psyche.[31] It does not diminish the terror involved. If anything, it intensifies it, because the source of evil is bound up with the protagonist and is thus more difficult to flee from.

Internalised evil can also be considered to be more frightening because of the way in which it blurs the line of demarcation between good and evil. In the classic medieval tale, the battle between the brave knight and the wicked dragon clearly marked out the boundaries between good and evil. In contrast, the doppelgänger removes these boundaries because it is contingent on the protagonist: "The *Doppelgänger* is a second self or *alter ego*, which appears as a distant and separate being apprehensible by the physical sense (or at least, by *some* of them), but exists in a dependent relation to the original."[32] The way in which this contingent relationship blurs the demarcation between good and evil is illustrated in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Dr Jekyll does not encounter a complete stranger in Mr Hyde. Instead, he encounters an integral part of himself. Good and evil become intertwined: "The doubling in the novel, then, does not establish or fix the boundaries of good and evil, self and other, but discloses the ambivalence of identity..."[33]

Rosemary Jackson identifies a similar idea in *Frankenstein*: "The monster has no name. It is anonymous, given identity only as Frankenstein's other, his grotesque reflection (hence the common confusion of the monster *as* Frankenstein)...Frankenstein tries to

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[30] Gordon Hirsch, "Frankenstein, Detective Fiction, and Jekyll and Hyde", in William Verder & Gordon Hirsch, ed., *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde After One Hundred Years* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 225.

[31] Many of the studies on the doppelgänger come from this sort of psychological perspective. In addition to Rank's study, that has already been mentioned, examples include Robert Rogers, *A Psychoanalytic Study of the Double in Literature* (Detroit: Waynes State University Press, 1970) and Freud's essay, "The Uncanny" (1919) to which I will be referring to later.

[32] Herdman, *The Double in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 14.

[33] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 141.

read the monster as a supernatural devil, 'I was cursed by some devil, and carried about with me my eternal hell', but it is made by him, self-generated…"[34]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the confusion between good and evil that was present in the doppelgänger had become increasingly significant. "When good and evil are intermingled they have a slippery tendency to change places and this undermines moral values and makes life seem uncertain and directionless. The grotesque is the literary means of portraying the human condition in such an unsure universe."[35] The doppelgänger helped to lay the foundation for the transformation of the traditional grotesque into the modern grotesque: Donald Fanger hints at the change that had occurred when he comments on two different nineteenth-century approaches to describing evils in the city: "The twenty-five-year-old Dickens sees them as lurid and criminal, where the twenty-five-year-old Dostoevsky sees them as vulgar and empty."[36] Dickens' traditional grotesque is noticeably different from the modern grotesque that Dostoevsky introduces.

Chesterton & The Traditional Grotesque

Perhaps the most obvious example of a traditional grotesque in Chesterton's fiction is in *The Ball and the Cross*. The novel is full of the bizarre combination of the real and the fantastic that is an integral part of any grotesque. This is particularly evident in the dream sequences that occur in "Chapter 15: The Dream of MacIan" and "Chapter 16: The Dream of Turnbull". The dreams that both MacIan and Turnbull experience correspond with elements of reality in the novel such as Professor Lucifer's spaceship. At the same time, the description of their experiences as dreams precludes a strictly realist interpretation. When Turnbull discovers that the judge who sentenced him has also been locked up in the lunatic asylum, he is astonished at, "this towering

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[34] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1981), p. 99.

[35] Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 157.

[36] Fanger, *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism*, p. 162.

unreality".[37] In the midst of these terrible occurrences, Chesterton inserts the comic element that is for him a necessary component of the grotesque. He highlights, "the huge and hilarious fact that Cumberland Vane had been locked up as a lunatic."[38]

The figure of Professor Lucifer provides the clearest example of the traditional grotesque in *The Ball and the Cross*. During his initial appearance, he cries out with a "dreadful mirth".[39] When he reappears as the Master later on in the story, he is described as having, "a cruel voice which always made all human blood turn bitter."[40] Elsewhere, the description of the Master confirms his image as a traditional grotesque: "The bushes broke and snapped abruptly behind them, and a very tall figure towered above Turnbull with an arrogant stoop and a projecting chin, a chin of which the shape showed queerly even in its shadow upon the path…They looked up into the eyes of the Master, but looked only for a moment. The eyes were full of a frozen and icy wrath, a kind of utterly heartless hatred."[41]

There is little ambiguity in the evil character that Chesterton creates in *The Ball and the Cross*. Emile Cammaerts writes: "The Master in *The Ball and the Cross* is called pointedly Professor Lucifer, and we had better leave it at that. The moralist has parted the sheep from the goats. As in the medieval picture, there is no subtle nuance between good and evil, and the devil is always painted black."[42] At the same time, Professor Lucifer's fearful appearance is counterbalanced with humour. He is described as, "*beaming* at them all with a *sinister benignity*"[43] [italics mine]. Similarly, the fear that he seeks to invoke in Michael becomes rather comical, when in the next breath, Michael casually warns him that he is about to crash the spaceship. At another point in the opening chapter, Chesterton subverts the terror of the Professor by portraying a childish innocence in his response: "Lucifer was looking at him with a bitten lip. 'Is

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[37] G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (1910; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1963), p. 227.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 227.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 241.

[42] Emile Cammaerts, *The Laughing Prophet: The Seven Virtues and G.K. Chesterton* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1937), p. 161.

[43] Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, p. 247.

that story really true?' he asked."[44] Moments later, Chesterton reinforces the grotesquerie by returning to a description of the Professor at his most terrifying: "Lucifer leapt upon him with a cry like a wild beast's."[45]

Although Professor Lucifer offers us a clear example of the traditional grotesque. *The Ball and the Cross* also anticipates the modern grotesque. Indeed, this is an important theme in the novel. MacIan and Turnbull's willingness to fight passionately for the truth that they believe in, ultimately leads to their imprisonment in a lunatic asylum. Standing in the lunatic asylum, MacIan exclaims: "Turnbull, this garden is not a dream, but an apocalyptic fulfilment. This garden is the world gone mad."[46] The world has gone mad because it has lost any sense of philosophical absolutes. Turnbull and MacIan stand on the verge of the existential predicament that is at the heart of the modern grotesque. With his absolute conception of truth, Turnbull reacts violently to such an idea. "All the rationalist and plain man revolted within him against bowing down for a moment in that forest of deception and egotistical darkness. He wanted to blow up that place of delusion with dynamite…"[47] The root of the modern grotesque that I have alluded to here is something that I will look at further in the following chapter.

Elsewhere in Chesterton's fiction, we find a general absence of the traditional grotesque. This is rather surprising in view of Chesterton's love of fairy stories. In *Orthodoxy* he wrote: "My first and last philosophy, that which I believe in with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery…The things I believed most then, the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales. They seem to me to be the entirely reasonable things."[48] Not only did Chesterton enjoy talking about the importance of fairyland; he also played a part in its continuing influence: "His defence of fairy-tales is an important part of the tradition which runs from George MacDonald (and ultimately

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[44] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 240.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[48] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (1908; repr London: The Bodley Head, 1927), p. 85.

Coleridge) through himself to C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien..."[49] We would expect to find Chesterton depicting traditional grotesques in his fairy stories, as the genre is ideally suited to such monsters. Yet this is not the case, as, rather surprisingly, Chesterton rarely chose to write fairy stories. (There are obvious exceptions to this, including: "The Disadvantage of Having Two Heads"[50] and "The Dragon at Hide-and-Seek".[51])

In the absence of any other definite reason, it is most reasonable to assume that Chesterton was simply not interested in writing fairy stories. However, in view of his praise of their simple morality,[52] it seems odd that he did not transport the traditional grotesque into other fictional genres. In the next two sections, I will look at why this was the case.

Detectives & Criminals

The traditional grotesque that was present in the early gothic novels gradually changed as the gothic genre adapted in the nineteenth century. Robert Spector reminds us that the gothic genre did not simply disappear: "...it is clear that something called Gothic fiction had come into being by 1764 and thrived until 1820 when, rather than disappearing, it dispersed into multiple forms and spread out into a host of different fictional possibilities."[53] One of these fictional possibilities was the detective story, a point that many critics have noted. In his seminal work on gothic literature, Devendra Varma observed the gothic influence on detective fiction: "The machinery, settings,

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[49] Stephen Medcalf, "The Achievement of G.K. Chesterton" in John Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1974), p. 114.

[50] Found in G.K. Chesterton, *The Coloured Lands* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938).

[51] Found in G.K. Chesterton, *Collected Works Volume 14: Short Stories, Fairy Tales, Mystery Stories* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

[52] "What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey...Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him by a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors have a limit, that these shapeless enemies have enemies, that these infinite enemies of man have enemies in the knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than darkness, and stronger than strong fear." Chesterton, "The Red Angel", *Tremendous Trifles*, pp. 102-3.

[53] Robert Donald Spector, *The English Gothic: A Bibliographic Guide to Writers from Horace Walpole to Mary Shelley* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), pp. 4-5.

themes, and characters of these thrillers are deeply reminiscent of Gothic novels."[54] Similarly, William Day tells us that: "The detective story is a natural response to the Gothic vision."[55] Day goes on to identify Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849) as the transitional link between the Gothics and detective writers: "We can even locate quite precisely the link between the two in the work of Edgar Allen Poe..."[56] Chesterton too, acknowledged the importance of Poe's influence on the origin of detective fiction. In his introduction to, *A Century of Detective Stories*, he explained: "The cycle of short stories, concerned with crime and detection, has its pivot in the name of Poe. He was an origin and very original..."[57]

One of the similarities between gothic fiction and detective fiction, is that there is an evil to be explained. This is as true of Walpole's, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), as it is of any of the Sherlock Holmes stories. However, when we look more closely, there is a subtle difference in the approach taken by the two genres. In his famous account of detective fiction, Julian Symons tells us that, "although the Gothic novel bears a relationship to the detective story in the sense that it often poses a mystery to be solved, the solution is never in itself of much interest."[58] Here Symons raises an interesting point: The Gothic novel presents us with a mystery of evil, and focuses on that mystery,

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[54] Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (1957; repr. New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1987), p. 238.

[55] William Patrick Day, *In the Circle of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 50.

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 50. In a similar vein is Benjamin Fisher's observation that: "Poe's preoccupation with Gothic horrors is well known..." in the preface to Michael L. Burduck, *Grim Phantasms: Fear in Poe's Short Fiction* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992). p. ix. The link between Poe and Chesterton has been noted by many, including Professor W.W. Robson: "Chesterton, like all detective story writers, derives from Poe. Indeed, it might be said that he derives from a single story of Poe: many of the Father Brown stories [e.g. "The Invisible Man"] can be regarded as ingenious variations on the theme of 'The Purloined Letter'.", Prof. W.W. Robson, "Father Brown and Others", in Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal*, p. 60.

[57] G.K. Chesterton, "Introduction", *A Century of Detective Stories* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1935), p. 10. Although Poe was obviously one of the founders of detective fiction, he was by no means the only founder. Frederick Crosson sees a three-fold foundation in the birth of the genre: "Brought to birth by Poe and Gaboriau, and furthered by Wilkie Collins with *The Moonstone*, the detective story reached its normal or canonical form with the extraordinary success of the tales of Sherlock Holmes." – Frederick J. Crosson, "Father Brown, Sherlock Holmes, and the Mystery of Man" in Rufus William Rauch, ed., *A Chesterton Celebration* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 23.

[58] Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel – A History*, Rev ed. (New York: Viking Penguin Inc, 1985), p. 28.

whereas the detective story begins with a mystery of evil and focuses on the rational solution to that mystery.

As gothic literature dispersed into many forms, one of which was the detective story, the traditional gothic grotesque was transformed into the criminal. Thus the ghost became the thief and the murderer. Conan Doyle's, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* helpfully illustrates this development. The perpetrator of the deaths appears to be a gothic grotesque. In actual fact, it turns out to be the work of a human criminal and his large hound.

As a result of this connection, we might expect to find traditional grotesques resurrected as grotesque criminals in Chesterton's detective stories. Martin Priestman warns us that this might not be the case when he identifies a certain ambiguity in Chesterton's use of evil characters: "A similar double insistence on the absolute distinction between good and evil, and on their mirror-like resemblance, runs throughout his work..."[59] I suggest that there are three main reasons why Chesterton's criminals do not normally provide us with traditional grotesques.

Firstly, Chesterton was keen to avoid dualism. For this reason he generally avoided focussing on the criminal in his fiction. In chapter three, I argued that Chesterton was unwilling to create a master criminal for Father Brown to struggle against (in the style of Doyle's Professor Moriarty) for this reason. In other collections of Chesterton's detectives stories, this idea is developed further as the alleged criminals are exonerated. In *Four Faultless Felons*, the alleged criminals turn out to be people that have been merely, "misunderstood one way or another."[60] Hence Ian Boyd's description of the tales as ones in which, "we have heroes who look like four different kinds of criminals".[61] A similar trait is present in *The Club of Queer Trades*. Thomas Peters explains: "An interesting aspect of *The Club of Queer Trades* is that in each story there appears to have been a crime committed, yet in each case the alleged crime turns out to

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[59] Martin Priestman, *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1990), p. 123.

[60] G.K. Chesterton, *Four Faultless Felons* (1930; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1962), p. 223.

[61] Ian Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton: A Study in Art and Propaganda* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1975), p. 155.

be merely an essentially harmless act by a member of the Club…Repeatedly G.K.C.'s stories point out that good deeds are sometimes mistaken for crimes…"[62]

The second reason behind Chesterton's lack of grotesque criminals is his tendency to give a rational explanation for apparently supernatural phenomena. Although the traditional grotesque is not intrinsically dependent upon the supernatural, the two are usually linked together. However, the crime is frequently capable of rational explanation and in this process, the criminal loses his potential for grotesquerie. A good example of this can be found in the story, "The Shadow of the Shark". A group of friends see a grotesque figure that does not appear to be human, staring at them through the window. At first Chesterton describes it as, "a large face looking at first rather like a green goblin mask in a pantomime."[63] Gabriel Gale then visualises the image as a "goblin-headed fish".[64] However, this inhuman grotesque is subsequently explained rationally, without reference to the supernatural. Dr Wilkes declares: "…I could see plainly enough it was a man playing you a trick of some sort."[65]

Although Chesterton believed in the supernatural, he wanted to explain naturally anything that could be explained naturally. In this respect, he followed in the footsteps of Aquinas. Chesterton's belief in the supernatural did not stretch to the numerous superstitions that surrounded him, and his fiction reflected this. By way of an explanation, he wrote: "I believe in the supernatural as a matter of intellect and reason, not as a matter of personal experience. I do not see ghosts; I only see their inherent probability."[66] Chesterton's tales often include the fantastic, but they do not usually include the fully fledged supernatural that is typically an element in the traditional grotesque criminal.

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[62] Thomas C Peters, *Battling for the Modern Mind: A Beginner's Chesterton* (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), p. 61.

[63] G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson, 1962), p. 59.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 59. This image echoes Chesterton's poem, "The Fish" (written in the 1890's).

[65] *Ibid.*, p. 59. W.W. Robson notes a similar tendency in the Father Brown stories: "It is notable that a frequent motif in the stories is the exposure of bogus mages." See W.W. Robson, "Introduction" to G.K. Chesterton, *Father Brown: A Selection* (Oxford: World's Classics, 1995), p. xvi.

[66] G.K. Chesterton, "The Perfect Game", *Tremendous Trifles*, p. 17.

The third reason behind this absence of grotesque criminals was the fact that Chesterton wanted to write fiction that avoided the pessimism he found in so many of his contemporaries. Chesterton believed that the Puritans bore some responsibility for this pessimistic approach. Through their rejection of the supernatural *per se*. Chesterton thought that they had allowed the world of the imagination to become dominated by evil and pessimism:

> Amid all the great work of Puritanism the damning indictment of it consists in one fact, that there was only one of the fables of Christendom that it retained and renewed, and that was the belief in witchcraft. It cast away the generous and wholesome superstition, it approved only of the morbid and the dangerous. In their treatment of the great national fairy-tale of good and evil, the Puritans killed St. George but carefully preserved the Dragon. And this seventeenth-century tradition of dealing with the psychic life still lies like a great shadow over England and America, so that if we glance at a novel about occultism we may be perfectly certain that it deals with sad or evil destiny."[67]

Chesterton saw Gothic literature, with its morbid fascination, as the natural consequence of this abdication: "But, on the whole, when the serious modern novel has dealt with the serious preternatural agency, it has not only been serious but sad."[68] Chesterton wanted his fiction to have an optimistic outlook.[69] This led him to avoid dwelling on evil grotesques in his detective fiction. If the Gothics had removed all of the optimism from fairy tales, then Chesterton believed that the detective story provided an opportunity to redress the balance: "As a critic said the other day, with profound truth, the detective story is really a fairy story."[70]

Chesterton's theological and polemical intentions stopped him from transporting the gothic grotesque into his detective fiction. Thus the traditional grotesque was robbed of the personality and power it required. Chesterton did not deny the reality of evil spirits: "I do not, of course, believe that good and evil spirits are merely allegories that stand

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[67] G.K. Chesterton, "A Midsummer Nights Dream", *The Common Man* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), p. 20.

[68] G.K. Chesterton, *Sidelights on New London and Newer York* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), p. 231.

[69] For a more detailed discussion of Chesterton's optimism, see the concluding chapter.

[70] G.K. Chesterton, "Real Crimes and Imaginary Mysteries", *The Illustrated London News* (1923; repr. *Collected Works Volume 33: The Illustrated London News 1923-1925,* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 26.

for abstractions"[71], he simply found no place for them in the fictional worlds that he wanted to create.

Spectacles & The Loss Of The Terrible

In 1919 Sigmund Freud wrote an important essay entitled, "The Uncanny".[72] This was an early attempt at approaching the grotesque from a psycho-analytic perspective. Much of Freud's discussion was based on the tale by E.T.A. Hoffman, "The Sand Man". The story centres around the legend of a bogeyman who puts children to sleep by pouring sand into their eyes. In his essay, Freud noted the significance of the eye in the story, and related it to the grotesque: "This short summary leaves no doubt, I think, that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes."[73] As critics have pointed out, Freud was not the first to notice the symbolic significance of the eye: "Nineteenth-century aesthetic theory frequently makes the eye the pre-eminent organ of truth."[74]

It is interesting to look at the way in which Chesterton used the image of the eye and the accompanying image of spectacles. On some occasions it has little to do with the grotesque. In "The Coloured Lands", the spectacles are simply a way of seeing the world afresh. Elsewhere though, they are clearly related to the modern grotesque. Dr Bull's grotesque appearance in, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, is primarily

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[71] G.K. Chesterton, "A Defence of *Jekyll and Hyde*", *The Illustrated London News* (1925; repr. *Collected Works Volume 33: The Illustrated London News 1923-1925*) p. 630-1.

[72] The German word, 'unheimlich', literally means 'unhomely'.

[73] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919; repr. Albert Dickson, ed., *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 14: Art and Literature*, London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 351. However, I should point out that while I agree with Freud that the symbolism of the eye is significant, I disagree with his interpretation of what that symbol actually means. He goes on to suggest that the fear of losing your eyes is often a substitute, "for the dread of being castrated." (p. 352.)

[74] "Introduction" to Carol T. Christ & John O. Jordan, ed., *Victorian Literature and the Victorian Visual Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 1995), p. xix-xx. This recent compendium of essays offers a number of interesting insights into aspects of the visual in Victorian culture.

due to his "infernal goggles"; so much so, that the chapter is entitled, "The Man in Spectacles".[75]

In the traditional grotesque, it was often the eye that was the source of terror. This is evident when we consider Professor Lucifer in *The Ball and the Cross*. One of the earliest descriptions of his appearance tells us that: "The Professor's eyes were blazing like a maniac's."[76] Conversely, in the character of Michael – the counterpart of Professor Lucifer – we discover eyes that are "quite bright, blue, and startled like those of a baby."[77] The contrast between the two descriptions is striking, and demonstrates Chesterton's belief that: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness."[78]

The arrival of spectacles in fiction has an important symbolic value. Spectacles signify the man-made additions that modernity has brought to everyday life. (It is interesting to find Professor Lucifer wearing them in *The Ball and the Cross*.[79] Modernity appears to have even affected the appearance of the Devil!) In the modern era, this subtle alteration has an important effect. Spectacles replace the eye as the source of terror. This transformation is powerfully illustrated in some of Chesterton's short stories. For example, in "The Tower of Treason", Bertram Drake's initial realisation that a murder has been committed is due to the grotesque nature of the spectacles: "He recognised the spectacles on the square and stolid face; they were horn spectacles of the plainest pattern, yet they did not somehow suit his figure, which was clothed loosely like an ordinary peasant. And in the tragedy of the moment they were almost grotesque. The very fixity of the spectacles on the face was one of those details of daily habit that suddenly make death incredible."[80] A further example can be found in, "The Trees of Pride". At one point the doctor's spectacles cause Mr Cyprian Paynter to become

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[75] G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908; repr. Oxford: World's Classics, 1996), p. 91.

[76] Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, p. 10.

[77] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[78] Matthew 6: 22-23 (New International Version).

[79] Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross*, p. 10.

[80] Chesterton, "The Tower of Treason", *Collected Works Vol. 14*, p. 301.

fearful: "...there seemed suddenly something ominous in the familiar fact that he wore spectacles."[81]

In the same way that spectacles are man made, so too is much of the terror of modernity. The image of spectacles, symbolises the way in which terror has become a human projection. Although the spectacles (i.e. terror) really exist in themselves, they do not have that intrinsic property of evil that we saw in the eye. Spectacles only appear evil – metaphysically speaking, they are neutral. When they are removed, there is often no real evil behind the terror that is projected. This idea is clearly illustrated in the Doctor who appears in "The Trees of Pride". We have already referred to the grotesque nature of his spectacles. In the rest of the story, other images are used to describe him as a grotesque figure of evil. At one point he appears to look like a symbol of death: "...he saw a dark figure standing quite still...It was topped by a tall black hat of a funereal type, and the whole figure stood so black against the field of crimson fire that edged the sky-line that he could not for an instant understand..."[82] In another description, we read: "What he saw...was the black figure with the black gloves against the blood-red sunset, as he had seen it when he came out of the wood, and which had always haunted him..."[83] The fact that the doctor is a medical practitioner – devoted to saving life rather than ending it – makes this description particularly poignant. And yet, in spite of all the appearances to the contrary, we later discover that the Doctor is innocent. Metaphorically speaking, when the spectacles are removed, so too is the evil grotesque that generates the sense of terror.

Spectacles not only provide a modern lens by which we look at the outside world; they also reflect the person wearing them. This means that every perception of grotesque terror incorporates some aspect of the self within it. In his essay "Wonder and the Wooden Post", Chesterton attacked the way in which mirrors encouraged the solipsistic thinking of many of his contemporaries:

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[81] Chesterton, "The Trees of Pride", *Collected Works Vol. 14*, p. 178.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[83] *Ibid.*, p. 208.

> The modern mystic looked for the post, not outside in the garden, but inside, in the mirror of his mind. But the mind of the modern mystic, like a dandy's dressing-room, was entirely made of mirrors. Thus glass repeated glass like doors opening inwards for ever; till one could hardly see that inmost chamber of unreality where the post made its last appearance...But I was never interested in mirrors; that is, I was never primarily interested in my own reflection – or reflections.[84]

The fact that terror no longer has any metaphysical basis in the modern world does not diminish its power. This is powerfully illustrated in H. G. Wells' story, *The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance*. In this story, Griffin (who is the invisible man), is depicted as a grotesque figure. Again the spectacles are significant. The first thing that Mrs Hall notices about Griffin is that, "he wore big blue spectacles".[85] She declares: "And they goggles! Why, he looked more like a divin' helmet then a human man!"[86] Later on there is a further reference to his, "monstrous goggle eyes".[87] Wherever Griffin goes, his appearance invokes terror, and yet the spectacles do not mask anything qualitative, for Griffin is invisible. But this provides the greatest source of terror in the novel, and perhaps in modernity. Nothingness becomes the ultimate terror. This idea is forcefully conveyed when Griffin unveils himself for the first time: "Then he removed his spectacles, and every one in the bar gasped...It was worse than anything. Mrs Hall, standing open-mouthed and horror-struck, shrieked at what she saw, and made for the door of the house. Every one began to move. They were prepared for scars, disfigurements, tangible horror, but *nothing*!"[88]

In the modern age, it appeared that 'nothingness' had become a chilling alternative to the traditional grotesque. Chesterton uses this idea in *The Man who Knew Too Much*, when Horne Fisher looks for the missing nobleman: "He would have been grieved, but not horrified, to come on the nobleman's body dangling from one of his own trees as

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[84] Chesterton, "Wonder and the Wooden Post", *The Coloured Lands*, pp. 159-60. Chesterton's use of the mirror image has been highlighted by other critics. See M. Versfeld, "Chesterton and St Thomas" *English Studies In Africa* Vol. 4. No. 2 (September 1961), pp. 142-4; and Lynette Hunter, *G.K. Chesterton: Explorations in Allegory* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979), pp. 161-2.

[85] H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man: A Grotesque Romance* (1897; repr. London: Everyman, 1995), p. 4.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[87] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

from a gibbet, or floating in his own pool like a pallid weed. What horrified him was to find nothing."[89]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have suggested that the traditional grotesque is a format that Chesterton rarely used. This is surprising in light of Chesterton's commitment to medieval values,[90] and the fairy stories genre. Two main reasons have been suggested to account for this. Firstly, as we saw from his detective fiction, Chesterton's theological and polemical commitments made the traditional grotesque an unsuitable format. Secondly, Chesterton understood that the traditional grotesque was no longer the most relevant source of terror in his age. Projected terror and nothingness had taken over from the monsters of the Middle Ages and the ghosts of the Gothics. This transformation can be seen in Chesterton's use of the spectacles image.

Although the first reason is interesting in terms of Chesterton's theology of evil, the second reason is more significant in terms of the grotesque. In this respect, Chesterton was a man of his age. By the beginning of the twentieth century the source of terror was located in the modern grotesque, and Chesterton responded to this. He recognised that the traditional grotesque had undergone a significant transformation. Margot Northey tells us that: "Increasingly, 'gothic' came to stand for a certain mood of terror or horror, in which the dark mysteries of life were brought to the fore."[91] As far as Chesterton was concerned, the universe had not undergone any ontological transformation. The change had occurred in mankind's perception of the universe. This point is articulated by Chesterton in his essay, "The Dragon's Grandmother": "In the fairy tales the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels

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[89] G.K. Chesterton, "The Hole in the Wall", *The Man who Knew Too Much* (1922; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1961), p. 103.

[90] Chesterton's fascination with the Middle Ages is carefully explored by John Coates in "Chapter 5: The Restoration of the Past", of his book, *Chesterton and The Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984).

[91] Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 4.

the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos."[92]

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[92] G.K. Chesterton, "The Dragons Grandmother", *Tremendous Trifles*, p. 98.

Chapter 6: The Modern Grotesque

In his discussion of Chesterton's novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, John Coates explains that: "Chesterton is pointing out...that there is in every human being, an innate fearfulness, which will find some subject..."[1] Evidence in support of this observation can be found in Chesterton's defence of fairy stories: "Fairy tales, then, are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already...The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination."[2] The idea that fear will always focus upon something, is central to the division between the traditional and modern grotesque. As I suggested in the previous chapter, Chesterton leant towards the modern grotesque, because he felt that it expressed the fears of his age most effectively.

Some critics have suggested that the genre of the grotesque is best suited to its modern form. In discussing the modern era, Bernard McElroy comments: "...there seems to be an affinity which makes the grotesque not only typical of our art, but perhaps its most characteristic expression, indeed at times even its obsession, in the same way that tragedy was the definitive mode of fifth-century BC Greece or satirical comedy of eighteenth-century England."[3] McElroy's observation echoes Thomas Mann, who said of modernity, that, "the grotesque is its most genuine style..."[4]

In this chapter I will examine Chesterton's use of the 'modern grotesque', a term that was introduced and explained in the previous chapter. We have already noted how the traditional grotesque developed into the modern grotesque during the nineteenth

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[1] John Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984), p. 219.

[2] G.K. Chesterton, "The Red Angel", *Tremendous Trifles* (1909; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1926), p. 102. This quotation also raises the question of whether evil is innate, or something that we acquire through our experience of the world. Chesterton believed that it was innate – it is "in the world already" because of original sin. In the next chapter, I examine Chesterton's understanding of original sin in more detail.

[3] Bernard McElroy, *Fictions of the Modern Grotesque* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1989), pp. 16-7.

[4] Thomas Mann, *Past Masters* (Trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter, London: Martin Secker, 1933), pp. 240-1.

century. This chapter will begin by exploring the transition to modernity that occurred at the turn of this century. I will then go on to look at Chesterton's concept of modernity, and demonstrate how he saw its inception in late nineteenth-century thought. Chesterton's novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, is central to my analysis of Chesterton and the modern grotesque. Before proceeding with an analysis of this novel, I will explain why it is so significant, and why it benefits from a comparison with the writings of Franz Kafka. My subsequent analysis will then be broken down into three sections which follow on from one another. These are: physical grotesques; the grotesque world; and the paranoid grotesque.

The Transition To Modernism

In his account of the history of Europe, Norman Davies comments on the significance of the shift to Modernism that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century: "Europe's political unease was matched by many of the cultural trends of the *fin de siècle*, which are often subsumed under the omnibus term of Modernism. Modernism involved a series of fundamental breaks with tradition that went far beyond the usual ebb and flow of intellectual fashion."[5] As Davies implies, the term Modernism is somewhat vague. Attempting to locate it more precisely, John Coates suggests that: "Many accounts take as their starting point an assertion that between around 1910-1914, there was a momentous revolution in English literature and culture."[6] For obvious reasons, the advent of the First World War in 1914 acts as a useful signpost for anyone trying to

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[5] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 854.

[6] John Coates, "Chesterton and the Modernist Cultural Context", in *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 15 No. 1 & 2 (February-May 1989), p. 51. Peter Faulkner identifies a similar period: "Looking back from the late twentieth century, we can see the arts of the period 1910-1930 as having a clear cultural identity to which the term 'Modernist' can reasonably be applied..." in Peter Faulkner, ed., *A Modernist Reader: Modernism in England 1910-1930* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1986), p. 13.

locate the arrival of Modernism.[7] Another signpost can be found in the death of Friedrich Nietzsche in 1900, a figure that I will consider later on in this chapter. The need for these signposts underlines the fact that Modernism did not arrive overnight, and suggests the value of identifying some of the important events that marked its emergence.

The publication of Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species* in 1859, paved the way for a philosophy of life in which human beings lost their qualitative distinction in the animal kingdom. Evolution appeared to deny that human beings were specially created in the image of God; instead suggesting that they were simply a collection of molecules that nature had selected for survival. Thus physical reductionism replaced a belief in the spiritual dimension of life. While Darwin did not explore the philosophical and social consequences of evolution, a number of his contemporaries, including Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), were not so reticent. The evolutionary ideas of Spencer (and others) became known as Social Darwinism,[8] and sought to apply the biological principle of natural selection (in which the fittest survived) to every area of life. Although Social Darwinism was not responsible for the outbreak of the First World War,[9] it did affect military strategy during the war. Both sides were willing to fight a war of attrition in the belief that the strongest army would eventually be victorious. Michael Howard writes: "The armies and nations of Europe thus went to war in 1914 expecting that there would be heavy losses...And the casualty lists that a later generation was to find so horrifying were considered by contemporaries not an

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[7] The First World War affected every part of society. In this respect, it was the first 'total war': "The immense losses of life and expenditure of munitions during 1915 brought home to people and government alike that this was an entirely new kind of war, in which the liabilities were unlimited, the commitment indefinite, the whole nation involved. The concept of total warfare, in which professional fighting men were but the spearhead and the framework for an all-out national effort in a life-or-death struggle, was too new and too horrible to be easily accepted by Englishmen." David Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century* (1965; repr. 2nd ed., with revisions by Geoffrey Warner, London: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 38.

[8] For an interesting study on the consequences of Social Darwinism, see Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought 1860-1915* (1944; repr. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945). Another application of evolutionary thought in the sphere of moral philosophy during this period can be seen in the interest that many people had in eugenics. Chesterton's objection to eugenics is clearly articulated in *Eugenics and other Evils* (1922).

[9] This point is convincingly argued by Roland N. Stromberg in his book, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), pp. 78-9.

indication of military incompetence, but a measure of national resolve, of fitness to rank as a Great Power."[10]

The theme of degeneration that is found in writing of the period,[11] expressed the social consequences of evolution that were felt at the time. The fullest contemporary account of this phenomenon can be found in Max Nordau's seminal study, *Degeneration*. As Tom Gibbons notes: "*Degeneration* was the Age of Evolution's most influential work of literary criticism."[12] This work, published in English in 1895, argued that much of the art and literature that emerged from late nineteenth-century Europe was the product of mental and physical degradation: "But the physician…recognises at a glance, in the *fin-de-siècle* disposition, in the tendencies of contemporary art and poetry…the confluence of two well-defined conditions of disease, with which he is quite familiar, viz. degeneration (degeneracy) and hysteria…"[13] The 'heart of darkness' theme, that is also present in literature of this period,[14] can be understood in a similar vein. Both themes represent the struggle of the age to assert a human identity beyond the animalistic vision offered by the theory of evolution.

A second important component in early Modernism was Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), whose discovery of psychoanalysis provided, "the first instrument for the scientific examination of the human mind."[15] In assessing his influence, Norman Davies reminds

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[10] Michael Howard, "Men against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914" in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 522.

[11] For an analysis of the way in which the literature of the period treated this theme, see Stephen Arata, *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Also see the article by Adrian Eckersley, "A Theme in the Early Works of Arthur Machen: 'Degeneration'", *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* Vol. 35 No. 3. (1992).

[12] Tom Gibbons, *Rooms in the Darwin Hotel* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1973), p. 36. Gibbons' book explores the influence of evolutionary thought on the literature of this period in further detail.

[13] Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (English Language Edition, 1895; repr. George Mosse, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p. 15.

[14] Examples of heart of darkness stories, include Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); Wells' *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896); Stoker's *Dracula* (1897); and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Murray Pittock writes: "The hearts of darkness in the fantastic tales of the Nineties are the central achievements of the writing characteristic of the period." – Murray G.H. Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890's* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 117.

[15] James Strachey, "Sigmund Freud: A Sketch of his Life and Ideas" in *The Penguin Freud Library Volume 14: Art and Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 17.

us that: "His work exercised a profound influence not only on the nascent medical sciences of psychology and psychiatry, but on all branches of the humanities concerned with the workings of mind and personality."[16] His environmental determinism accompanied the biological determinism of evolution in attacking the concept of human free will.[17] In addition, Freud fostered an obsessive concern with the internal workings of the mind, which was subsequently reflected in much of the literature of Modernism.[18]

A third area of transition occurred in the Arts, which moved away from their representational tradition. The rise of the Impressionists in the 1860's and 1870's was particularly momentous: "Modern painting broke forever with the representational art which had prevailed since the Renaissance..."[19] The impact of the Impressionists went further than the paintings of artists such as Claude Monet (1840-1926), Edgar Degas (1834-1917), Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) and Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). The Impressionists spawned other groups such as the Pointillists, the Neo-Impressionists, the Synthesists, the Expressionists and the Cubists. Indeed: "Virtually every major development in 20th-century art is traceable back to the Impressionists."[20] The break with representational art involved a move away from objectivity towards subjectivity, in an attempt to rediscover the real.

Another crucial change took place in the field of literature, as authors departed from the realism of the classic nineteenth-century novels: "In *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, Eliot replaces the standard flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substitutes for the traditional coherence of poetic structure a dislocation of parts, in which remote components are related by connections which are left to the reader to

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[16] Davies, *Europe: A History*, p. 861.

[17] Chesterton's rejection of determinism is discussed in chapter seven.

[18] One of the best examples of the neurotic tendencies of modernist literature can be found in the writings of D.H. Lawrence.

[19] Davies, *Europe: A History*, p. 862.

[20] Martin Seymour-Smith, in Alan Bullock, ed., *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana Books, 1977), p. 303. The influence of the Impressionists upon Chesterton is discussed later in this chapter.

discover, or invent."[21] Other modern writers such as Joseph Conrad and Virginia Woolf, broke up narrative continuity through the use of techniques such as stream of consciousness.[22] Both literature and art became increasingly subjective in both form and content, reflecting the transformation that was occurring in society:

> Modernism, then, in the literary sense, is seen as developing out of and expressing a somewhat sudden failure of confidence in the idea of the rational, moral individual. It announces too, a collapse of that confidence in a common or shared experience which gave the great Victorian novelists the confidence that their audience's perception of life was sufficiently like their own to claim assent to what they represented as "reality" and to permit, or even encourage, such author's habit of direct address on moral topics.[23]

A fourth area of transformation was the emergence of sociology, through the writings of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Max Weber (1864-1920).[24] Both Durkheim and Weber referred to society rather than God as their external point of reference. (Although they were not particularly original in this, they were very influential.) Because society itself was in a state of flux, sociology inadvertently added to the uncertainty and fragmentation that accompanied Modernism.

Finally, the increasing dominance of the economic sphere became an important episode in the development of Modernism.[25] In the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution brought economics to the forefront of contemporary thought, and this was a legacy that Modernism inherited. Marxism provided an obvious illustration of the way

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[21] M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed.(London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston Inc. 1988), p. 109.

[22] A more thorough discussion of modernist literature can be found in Malcolm Bradbury & James McFarlane, ed., *Modernism: 1890-1930* (1974; repr. Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1978).

[23] Coates, "Chesterton and the Modern Cultural Context", p. 53. Modernism also had a profound influence on music, through the work of composers such as Stravinsky.

[24] Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was the founding father of sociology as a discipline. However, Durkheim and Weber are normally considered to be the two most important figures in the early development of sociology, and thus their location in the Modernist period is significant.

[25] The dominance of economic thought during Modernity was powerfully illustrated by Bruce Barton's book, *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925), in which Barton presented Jesus as a highly successful businessman. This was the best selling non-fiction book in the Unites States between 1925 and 1926.

in which economic theory profoundly influenced Modernism.[26] The Russian Bolshevik victory of 1917 led to the polarising of the world into two camps – Capitalist and Communist. For perhaps the first time in history, the world was divided according to economic theory.

The events outlined make it clear that the roots of Modernism go back into the latter part of the nineteenth century. One commentator on the 1890's tells us: "The legacy of the Nineties was immense: subjectivism, alienation, the apotheosis of the artist, a sense of fragmentation at the heart of Western culture..."[27] With this in mind, I will go on to look at the way in which Chesterton's conception of Modernism was rooted in the late nineteenth century.

Modernism According To Chesterton

In his article on Modernism, John Coates considers a criticism made by T.S. Eliot in 1927, that Chesterton was so obsessed with the 1890's that he ignored developments in the modernist literature of the period. Coates provides the following response:

> The older man may have been failing to keep abreast year by year with the rapidly changing strategies and techniques of 1920's Modernism, but his unfashionable preoccupation with the 1890's now looks not merely defensible but a mark of deeper philosophical and intellectual understanding. Eliot was criticising Chesterton, with apparent plausibility, for a lack of interest in the secondary symptoms of Modernism, in the artistic innovations of the day or the decade. In fact, Chesterton, taking a far longer view, was concerned with the

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[26] The influential Marxist thinker, Raymond Williams, has argued that the theories of Karl Marx had a delayed impact on English culture: "Marx was the contemporary of Ruskin and George Eliot, but the Marxist interpretation of culture did not become widely effective in England until the thirties of our own century." Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1958; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 258.

[27] Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence*, p. 181.

> whole cultural, political and religious ground out of which those innovations were a relatively late flower.[28]

Chesterton thought that the close of the nineteenth century – also known as the *fin de siècle*[29] – marked the start of Modernism. Chesterton suggested that 1880 provided the most obvious starting date: "There came a time, roughly somewhere about 1880, when the two great positive enthusiasms of Western Europe had for the time exhausted each other – Christianity and the French Revolution."[30]

It was in the early 1880's, that Aestheticism, which was an important part of the *fin de siècle*, began to flourish. In a fascinating article, Ian Fletcher explores the geographical association that Aestheticism had with the London suburb of Bedford Park.[31] This has a direct association with Chesterton, who spent some years in Bedford Park during the late 1890's, and clearly alludes to it in the opening pages of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare.*[32]

Pessimism was another central feature of the *fin de siècle*, a point which Chesterton attributed to the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Introducing a dramatic adaptation of his novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, Chesterton explained: "I can remember the time when pessimism was dogmatic, when it was even orthodox. The people who read Schopenhauer regarded themselves as having found out

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[28] Coates, "Chesterton and the Modernists Cultural Crisis", pp. 55-6. Coates is not alone in highlighting the role that the 1890's played in the emergence of Modernism. Karl Beckson refers to, "the crucial role that Aestheticism and Decadence played in the development of Modernism", *London in the 1890's: A Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 381. A similar idea is also present in David Weir's book, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), where he argues that the decadent movement was central to the shift from romanticism to Modernism.

[29] *'Fin de siècle'*, seems the most appropriate term to describe an array of interconnected developments that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. Holbrook Jackson's famous study of the period. *The Eighteen Nineties*, begins with a chapter entitled, "Fin de Siècle – 1890-1900".

[30] G.K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; repr. London: Williams & Norgate, 1923), p. 206.

[31] Ian Fletcher, "Bedford Park: Aesthetes' Elysium?" in Ian Fletcher, ed., *Romantic Mythologies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967).

[32] In the novel, Chesterton renames the suburb, Saffron Park. Bedford Park was a place of some importance to Chesterton, partly because he met his wife Frances there in 1896. In his *Autobiography*, Chesterton names one of the chapters after Bedford Park, calling it, "The Fantastic Suburb".

everything, and found that it was nothing."[33] A similar allusion to Schopenhauer is made by Dr Bull in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, when he describes the Anarchist Council as a, "powerful and fanatical church, a church of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind like vermin."[34]

Although it is unlikely that Chesterton studied Schopenhauer in much depth, his analysis was essentially correct. Chesterton rightly identified pessimism as being at the heart of Schopenhauer's philosophy, a point which Christopher Janaway confirms in his summary of Schopenhauer's position: "Life has no purpose. Being ourselves is not something which has any positive value…Such uncomfortable, challenging thoughts represent his distinctive contribution to modern culture."[35] Chesterton also recognised the influence that Schopenhauer exerted on the wider literary tradition. John Lester writes: "As a matter of cultural history, it is worth noting the extraordinary spread of Arthur Schopenhauer's influence coincidentally with the impact of pessimism between 1880 and 1914…the spread of Schopenhauer's Weltanschauung must indicate a strong measure of influence on the pessimistic mood as it developed in the late nineteenth century."[36] Thomas Hardy provides an obvious example of a writer whose pessimism found considerable affinity with the philosophy of Schopenhauer.[37]

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[33] G.K. Chesterton, "Foreword" to Mrs Cecil Chesterton & Ralph Neale, *The Man who was Thursday: Adapted from the Novel of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1926), p. 4.

[34] G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908: repr. Oxford: World's Classics, 1996), p. 108. In the explanatory notes that accompany this edition, Stephen Medcalf agrees that the phrase "church of eastern pessimism" is probably a reference to Schopenhauer.

[35] Christopher Janaway, *Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 100.

[36] John A. Lester, Jr, *Journey Through Despair 1880-1914: Transformations in British Literary Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 62.

[37] In discussing the influence of Schopenhauer (and von Hartmann) on Hardy, Irving Howe writes: "[Hardy] did not need their help, or anyone else's, in order to reach his 'twilight view' of man's diminished place in the universe, but he did find in their philosophic speculation a support – he might have said a confirmation – for his own temperamental bias." In *Thomas Hardy*, Rev. ed. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), p. 134. It is difficult to argue for a more direct influence, as Hardy did not begin to read Schopenhauer until the late 1880's; well after his most formative period. However, Hardy did find a great affinity in the pessimism of Schopenhauer. He read and owned a number of Schopenhauer's writings, including his doctoral dissertation, which was published in English in 1889 with the title *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*. It is also interesting to note that Hardy, "had a great liking for Schopenhauer's own favourite author, the seventeenth-century Spanish moralist Baltasar Gracian.", Martin Seymour-Smith, *Hardy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, 1994), p. 329.

Another important figure for Chesterton in the rise of Modernism was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who, "articulated many of the era's most shocking thoughts".[38] His famous parable, "The Madman", symbolised a new dawn in Western culture:

> Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is more and more night not coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? – gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.[39]

Although there is no direct evidence to suggest that Chesterton was familiar with the parable of "The Madman", it is interesting to see how he recreates the figure of Zarathustra (who represents Nietzsche,) in the character of Lucian Gregory – the one true anarchist in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Gregory declares his intention, "to abolish God",[40] and preaches it to anyone that will listen.

Nietzsche's cultural analysis of Christianity, in which he introduced the concept of the death of God, had a profound effect on writers of the period. As John Lester points out, "the theme reverberates through the fin de siècle".[41] Another critic describes Nietzsche as "the writer who can be considered the dominant intellectual figure of the fin de siècle, and whose work embodies all its various strands".[42] Nietzsche's influence upon Modernism stretched beyond the *fin de siècle*, into the early-twentieth century, as John Foster points out when he refers to, "Nietzsche's overwhelming importance for a group of writers in the early-twentieth century."[43] Nietzsche's works began to be translated

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[38] Davies, *Europe: A History*, p. 854.

[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882; repr. in *A Nietzsche Reader*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 203.

[40] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 20.

[41] Lester, *Journey Through Despair 1880-1914*, p. 50.

[42] Bergonzi, Bernard, *The Early H.G. Wells: A Study of the Scientific Romance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961), p. 9.

[43] John Burt Foster, Jr, *Heirs to Dionysius: A Nietzschean Current in Literary Modernism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 23. For further comment regarding the influence of Nietzsche on various Modernist writers, see Keith M. May, *Nietzsche and Modern Literature: Themes in Yeats, Rilke, Mann and Lawrence* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988) The most complete analysis of Nietzsche's reception in England is provided by David S. Thatcher in his book, *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914: The Growth of a Reputation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

into English in 1895, although it was A.R. Orage who first popularised Nietzsche with his two books: *Friedrich Nietzsche; The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (1906), and *Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism* (1907).

Nietzsche's belief in the will to power was linked with evolutionary thought: "The effect of the Nietzsche cult, from around 1890 to 1914, was to confirm and to intensify the already prevalent evolutionary myth..."[44] Nietzsche saw the natural consequences of Darwin's theory; that the survival of the fittest would lead to the emergence of the superman. Chesterton was concerned at the way in which writers such as George Bernard Shaw seemed to embrace this idea. Parodies of the evolution of the superman can be found in "How I Found the Superman" in *Alarms and Discursions* (1910), as well as the character of Lord Ivywood in *The Flying Inn* (1914). Chesterton was also concerned at the way in which evolution threatened individual identity. At the beginning of *The Ball and the Cross*, Chesterton wrote: "For the world of science and evolution is far more nameless and elusive and like a dream than the world of poetry or religion; since in the latter images and ideas remain themselves eternally, while it is the whole idea of evolution that identities melt into each other as they do in a nightmare."[45]

The melting of identity that permeated Nietzsche's evolutionary thought, resembled the philosophy of the Impressionists and the Decadents in the late-nineteenth century: "A resounding philosophic expression of decadence is obviously found in the thought of Nietzsche, who wrote at the very heart of the period and who became the self-ordained philosopher of decadence."[46] Chesterton's use of the term Impressionism was not limited to the artistic school of that name, although it did not exclude it either. Chesterton considered Impressionism to be a general philosophical position: "What Chesterton encountered was not Impressionism, a certain technique, or a school of French painting, but 'Impressionism' as seen by [George] Moore, a set of attitudes, or a way of perceiving, hostile to Chesterton's childhood vision, his sense of the

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[44] Coates, "Chesterton and the Modern Cultural Context", p. 62.

[45] G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (1910; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1963), p. 7.

[46] Suzanne Nalbantian, *Seeds of Decadence in the Late-Nineteenth-Century Novel: A Crisis in Values* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1984), pp. 1-2.

relationship of object to object in the material world."[47] Chesterton explained this in his *Autobiography*: "But I think there was a spiritual significance in Impressionism, in connection with this age as the age of scepticism. I mean that it illustrated scepticism in the sense of subjectivism."[48] Discussing Impressionism, Chesterton continued: "Whatever may be the merits of this as a method of art, there is obviously something highly subjective and sceptical about it as a method of thought. It naturally lends itself to the metaphysical suggestion that things only exist as we perceive them, or that things do not exist at all. The philosophy of Impressionism is necessarily close to the philosophy of Illusion."[49]

Understood in this wider philosophical sense, Impressionism was closely linked to the Decadent Movement. Both considered the objectivity of existence to be an illusion, and thus emphasised the autonomy of art, with its ensuing subjectivity. Chesterton's relationship with the decadents is carefully explored by Gillian Cross in her thesis, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents:* "When the question has been fully discussed, it will be seen that although the 'literary influence' of the Decadence upon Chesterton's work, in strict terms, is not very great, his absorption of and subsequent fear of the Decadent mood is of far greater importance to his thinking and his mode of expression than has ever been suggested before."[50] Although Chesterton ostensibly rejected decadent thought, his style was clearly influenced by the decadents. One example can be found in his use of colour: "But his own passion for gaudy colour is not simply toy-theatre heraldry, it is also Nineties aestheticism."[51] Another can be found in Chesterton's typical description of the poet in his fiction: "Likewise Chesterton's idea of the poet,

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[47] Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 196. The impact of George Augustus Moore (1852-1933) on the emergence of impressionism is discussed by Coates in further detail in chapter nine of his book. For an outline of Chesterton's response to Moore, see Chesterton's essay, "The Moods of Mr George Moore" in *Heretics* (1905).

[48] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 88.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

[50] Gillian Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Sussex University, 1973), p. iii.

[51] P.N. Furnbank, "Chesterton the Edwardian", John Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal* (London: Paul Elek, 1974), pp. 18-9. The symbolic importance of colour in Chesterton's fiction is a theme that I return to in the concluding chapter.

flaming-haired and gorgeous-tongued, is Wildean; it is Swinburne as transmitted by Wilde."[52]

Oscar Wilde was probably the most important figure in the English decadent movement: "Wilde's death at the end of 1900 served to confirm the nineties as a decade apart, and to fix Wilde's place at the centre of it."[53] Chesterton agreed with this perception of Wilde's importance. His discussion of the period in *The Victorian Age in Literature*, concludes that Wilde was the bandmaster of the Decadent and Aesthetic movement.[54] If Wilde was the bandmaster of the English decadent movement, then his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) was surely the theme tune.[55]

The Picture of Dorian Gray captured two elements of English decadence that derived from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. First, it expressed the need for sensational experiences to counter the decadent's weariness with existence: "This weary but desperate search after sensation, then, was the heart of the English Decadence."[56] This was the natural consequence of Schopenhauer's belief in the futility of the universe. Chesterton commented: "That beautiful faith in human nature and in freedom…seemed slowly and sadly to be drying up."[57] Second, Wilde's novel conveyed the loss of identity and reality that resulted from Nietzsche's denial of objectivity. In the novel, the distinction between art and reality breaks down, as Dorian's destiny becomes entwined with that of his portrait. In the preface to the novel, Wilde tells us that: "It is the

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[53] Matthew Sturgis, *Passionate Attitudes: The English Decadence of the 1890's* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995), p. 299. Gillian Cross also notes the importance of Oscar Wilde to the decadence movement in her thesis. See Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents*, p. 3.

[54] Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature*, p. 218. John Coates has highlighted the influence of Walter Pater on Wilde and the Decadents: "Yet, restrained as Pater characteristically is, his position is open to abuse by coarser minds, such as that of Oscar Wilde…In this sense, Pater's are the views behind that 1890's dabbling with the bizarre against which Chesterton reacted." Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 180. Wilde had read Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* at Oxford, and later admitted to being greatly influenced by what he had read.

[55] In their preface to *Decadence and the 1890's*, Ian Fletcher & Malcolm Bradbury state that, "it is difficult to isolate any purely decadent novel other than *The Picture of Dorian Gray* or George Moore's *Mike Fletcher*.", Ian Fletcher, ed., *Decadence and the 1890's* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publisher Inc, 1980), p. 12.

[56] Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents*, p. 9.

[57] Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature*, p. 209.

spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors."[58] This caused Chesterton to respond with the observation: "Impressionism was, I think, an expression of scepticism."[59]

Chesterton personally encountered and rejected Impressionist philosophy during his time at The Slade School of Art in 1893-1895. John Coates confirms that Moore's Impressionism dominated Slade during this period: "Moore's single-handed crusade on behalf of Impressionism (c 1887-95) overlaps Chesterton's years at Slade…Throughout Chesterton's time at the Slade, the school was associated with a new combatively expressed view of painting of which Moore was the fugleman."[60] This was a formative period in Chesterton's life, as he admitted at the start of the appropriate chapter of his *Autobiography*; "I deal here with the darkest and most difficult part of my task; the period of youth which is full of doubts and morbidities and temptations; and which, though in my case mainly subjective, has left in my mind for ever a certitude upon the objective solidity of Sin."[61] Describing the philosophy he met with at The Slade, Chesterton wrote: "In the time of which I write it was also a very negative and even nihilistic philosophy. And though I never accepted it altogether, it threw a shadow over my mind…"[62] It was the Impressionism that he experienced at The Slade (which, as we have seen, represented the thought of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Decadents), that formed the basis of Chesterton's conception of modernity. Cecil Chesterton pointed out that this was at the heart of Chesterton's numerous polemics against modernity: "What is the essence of Mr Chesterton's attack on modern thought? Briefly, I think it may be summarized as follows. The scepticism of the cleverest thinkers has made man doubtful about those axioms which cannot safely be the subject of doubt, and has consequently left their minds derelict on a sea of indecision."[63]

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[58] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891; repr. Herts: Wordsworth Classics, 1994), p. 6.

[59] G.K. Chesterton, "When I was Young", (1925; repr. *The G.K. Chesterton Quarterly* No. 3, Summer 1997), p. 6.

[60] Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 197.

[61] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 77. (Chesterton makes it clear that this chapter refers to his time at The Slade: "In this chapter, the period covered is roughly that of my going to an art school…" p. 87.)

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[63] Cecil Chesterton, *G.K. Chesterton: A Criticism* (London: Alston Rives Ltd, 1908), p. 144.

Understanding *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (With Reference To Kafka)

At the start of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, Chesterton includes a dedication to his childhood friend, Edmund Clerihew Bentley, which provides a vital clue as to the novel's meaning. The third stanza begins: "This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells."[64] In the foreword to a dramatic adaptation of his novel, Chesterton explained the substance of those 'old fears':

> There is a great deal in the modern world that I think evil and a great deal more that I think silly; but it does seem to me to have escaped from this mere prison of pessimism. Our civilisation may be breaking up…But it is not merely closing in; and therefore it is not a nightmare, like the narrow despair of the 'nineties…and it was in the middle of a thick London fog of these things that I sat down and tried to write this story, nearly twenty years ago.[65]

In discussing the nightmare of the 1890's, Chesterton singles out science and art. He writes: "Science announced nonentity and art admired decay."[66] The 'nonentity of science' referred to the melting of identity involved in evolution, while 'art's decay' is a reference to the decadent's weariness with existence.

While the crisis described in his dedication was deeply personal, Chesterton also thought that it had ramifications for the wider culture. This is alluded to when he mentions the "City of Mansoul"; a reference to Bunyan's *Holy War*. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan described the personal struggle of an individual. In the *Holy War*, he described the struggle of an entire culture. Although Chesterton's novel clearly has an autobiographical dimension, we should not ignore the wider cultural overtones. Indeed, the solution that Chesterton found to his own personal crisis, is the same solution that he offered to his culture: "We have found common things at last, and marriage and a creed."[67] Elsewhere Chesterton explained the importance of the church in this regard:

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[64] Chesterton, "Dedication", *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare.*

[65] Chesterton, "Foreword" to Mrs Cecil Chesterton & Ralph Neale, *The Man who was Thursday: Adapted from the Novel of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd, 1926), p. 4.

[66] Chesterton, "Dedication", *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare.*

[67] *Ibid.*

"I have said that my morbidities were mental as well as moral; and sounded the most appalling depths of fundamental scepticism and solipsism. And there again I found that the Church had gone before me and established her adamantine foundations: that she affirmed the actuality of external things..."[68]

All attempts to understand and explain *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, face an interpretative dilemma. As one reviewer remarked upon the book's publication: "But when he [Chesterton] asks, in the introductory poem, dedicating it to an old friend, "Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?" we are grateful to him for acknowledging the difficulties of the reader."[69]

The first common mistake made when reading the novel, is trying to fit the whole story into too tight an interpretative scheme. John Coates risks this error when he says: "Much might be written about the design of *The Man who was Thursday* and critics have suggested how carefully every detail in the novel fits within the whole intellectual scheme..."[70] Chesterton is unable to limit himself to a single intellectual scheme in most of his short stories, let alone in his novels. When writing about *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, Chesterton admitted that the moral of the story did not cover every detail of the story: "I tried to turn this notion of resistance to a nightmare into a topsy turvey tale about a man who fancied himself alone among enemies, and found that each of the enemies was in fact on his own side, and in his own solitude. That is the only thing that can be called a meaning in the story; all the rest of it was written for fun..."[71]

The second mistake that critics of the novel sometimes make is either ignoring the subtitle, or marginalising its importance. When the novel was published, one reviewer wrote: "*The Man who was Thursday*, then, is a story, in the form of a dream, of a

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[68] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 353.

[69] Unsigned review, *The Westminster Gazette*, March 7, 1908, p. 5.

[70] Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 217.

[71] Chesterton, "Foreword" to Mrs Cecil Chesterton & Ralph Neale, *The Man who was Thursday: Adapted from the Novel of G.K. Chesterton*, p. 5.

nightmare that is ended."[72] Elsewhere, Kingsley Amis described the tale as, "a half-decipherable message about life being a bewildering but good-natured and all-reconciling joke."[73] In more recent times, Stephen Medcalf has suggested that Chesterton's understanding of 'nightmare' is no more threatening than the dreamlike style he found in Shakespeare's, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[74] These attempts to diminish the centrality of the nightmare were strongly resisted by Chesterton: "To do it justice, by its own description, it is not a novel, but a nightmare. And…that sub-title is perhaps the only true and reliable statement in the book…"[75] For Chesterton at least, if not always for the critic, the subtitle was the essential point of the story: "But the point is that the whole story is a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the '90's…"[76]

It is the nightmare element within *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, that prompted Jorge Luis Borges to draw a parallel between Chesterton, and the Czech writer, Franz Kafka. Borges explained: "…Chesterton restrained himself from being Edgar Allen Poe or Franz Kafka, but something in the makeup of his personality leaned towards the nightmarish, something secret, and blind, and central."[77]

In my analysis of the modern grotesque within *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, I will draw comparisons with the work of Franz Kafka. (1883-1924). The

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[72] Unsigned review, *The Morning Post*, March 9, 1908, p. 2.

[73] Kingsley Amis, "The Poet and the Lunatics", (1971; repr. Denis Conlon, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 271.

[74] This idea is found in Stephen Medcalf's informative introduction to the edition of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* that I have used throughout. Medcalf writes: "We can find what he meant by a nightmare in his remarks in 1904 on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." (p. xxxiv) While this might appear to be a plausible suggestion, I suggest that it is mistaken in light of the various comments that Chesterton makes regarding the tale (see the comments that follow in the text above). In addition, Chesterton's description of 'the nightmare' in his essay of the same name (see *Alarms and Discursions*, 1910) clearly suggests something beyond the dreamlike quality of Shakespeare's play.

[75] Chesterton, "Foreword" to Mrs Cecil Chesterton & Ralph Neale, *The Man who was Thursday: Adapted from the Novel of G.K. Chesterton*, p. 3. Later on in the foreword, Chesterton is careful to distinguish his nightmare from the new nightmares being described in 1926, which he considers to be essentially "frivolous." (p. 4.) Chesterton also emphasised the importance of the subtitle in an article published in the *Illustrated London News*, (1936, repr. G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* London: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 185-6.

[76] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 99.

[77] Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions* (1952; trans. Ruth L.C. Simms, London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 1973), p. 84.

reason for doing so is that Kafka is a vitally important figure for anyone seeking to understanding the modern grotesque. He is the first author that Bernard McElroy turns to when analysing the modern grotesque, and it is easy to see why. W.H. Auden declared: "Had one to name the artist who comes nearest to bearing the same kind of relation to our age that Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe bore to theirs, Kafka is the first one would think of."[78] Auden continued: "Kafka is important to us because the predicament of his hero is the predicament of the contemporary man."[79] Milan Kundera also observed that Kafka was able, "to say things about our human condition (as it reveals itself in our century) that no social or political thought could ever tell us."[80] By comparing *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* with the writings of Kafka, I will demonstrate how effectively Chesterton expressed the modern grotesque, and helped to develop our understanding of it.

The connection between Kafka and Chesterton has been noted before by various Chesterton critics apart from Borges.[81] C.S. Lewis noticed a connection between the two writers which led him to comment that: "...both give a powerful picture of the loneliness and bewilderment which each one of us encounters in his (apparently) single-handed struggle with the universe..."[82] Although critics have connected Chesterton and Kafka, they have remained acutely aware of the different worldviews held by the two writers: "The similarity is, of course, not total; Kafka's work has the unqualified single-mindedness of an intense poetic vision...Chesterton, however, fights

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[78] W.H. Auden, "The Wandering Jew" *The New Republic* (10th February, 1941), p. 185.

[79] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[80] Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (1986; trans. Linda Asher, London: Faber & Faber, 1988), p. 117. Interestingly enough, Kafka also makes it into Harold Bloom's treatise on the Western Canon, as one of the definitive writers of the twentieth century. See Harold Bloom, "Chapter 20: Kafka: Canonical Patience and Indestructibility", *The Western Canon* (London: Papermac, 1995).

[81] For example: Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis*, p. 220; Dudley Barker, *G.K. Chesterton* (London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1973), pp. 175-6; and Gary Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), see "Chapter 3: Paradox and Nightmare".

[82] C.S. Lewis, "Period Criticism", *Of This And Other Worlds* (London: Fount Books, 1982), p. 151.

the possibility of the monstrous, which is for him only one element in a much more complex view of reality…"[83]

Despite their differences, there is clearly a sufficient degree of commonality between Chesterton and Kafka to justify comparative study. Both writers lived amid the onset of modernity, and both struggled personally with the philosophy it entailed. Both writers were influenced by similar pieces of literature. These included Dickens,[84] the Book of Job,[85] and fairy stories.[86] Perhaps the most significant link between them though is the fact that Kafka appears to have read Chesterton. Gustav Janouch recalls his conversations with Kafka, and tells us:

> I was given two books by G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* and *The Man who was Thursday*.
> Kafka said, *"He is so gay, that one might almost believe he had found God."*
> "So for you laughter is a sign of religious feeling?"
> *"Not always. But in such a godless time one must be gay. It is a duty. The ship's orchestra played to the end on the sinking Titanic. In that way one saps the foundation of despair."*
> "Yet a forced gaiety is much sadder than an openly acknowledged sorrow."
> *"Quite true. Yet sorrow has no prospects. And all that matters is prospects, hope, going forward. There is danger only in the narrow, restricted moment.*

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[83] Cross, *G.K. Chesterton and the Decadents*, p. 51. Gary Wills writes along similar lines when he states: "Kafka's heroes become dogs, beetles, and prisoners at the blink of a blood-veined eye; Chesterton's become, in a twinkling, kings and heroes." Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask*, pp. 49-50.

[84] Chesterton wrote a number of pieces on Dickens including his two books, *Charles Dickens* (1906) and *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911). Kafka's interest in Dickens is carefully documented by Mark Spilka in his study, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation* (London: Denis Dobson, 1963).

[85] Chesterton wrote his introduction to the "Book of Job" in 1907, although he was clearly familiar with the book at an earlier date. See his comments in *The Defendant* (1901; repr. London: J. M. Dent & Co Ltd, 1918), pp. 69-70. Kafka's interest in Job is discussed by Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography*, 2nd ed. (1960; trans. G. Humphreys Roberts & Richard Winston, New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), pp. 180-184.

[86] Chesterton's passion for fairyland is legendary: "The things I believed most then, the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales." G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1927), p. 85. Concerning Kafka we read: "Kafka read and loved fairy tales all his life.", David Zane Mairowitz & Robert Crumb, *Kafka for Beginners* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1993), p. 110.

> *Behind it lies the abyss. If one overcomes it, everything is different. Only the moment counts. It determines life."*[87]

Physical Grotesques

Modernism distorts aspects of existence, rendering them physical grotesques. This can be seen in the members of the Anarchist Council that we meet in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*: "At his introduction to the others on the Council, the novel starts to earn its subtitle, *A Nightmare*. They are not only hateful, they are physically monstrous in a way that seems to body forth the evil in their souls."[88] Numerous examples of grotesque council members can be found in the novel.

The ascetic secretary – Monday – has a crooked smile that strikes fear into the heart of Syme:

> Many people have this nervous trick of a crooked smile, and in many it is even attractive. But in all Syme's circumstances, with the dark dawn and the deadly errand and the loneliness on the great dripping stones, there was something unnerving in it. There was the silent river and the silent man, a man of even classic face. And there was the last nightmare touch that his smile suddenly went wrong.[89]

What frightens Syme is not that he faces an embodiment of evil in the form of a traditional grotesque, but that he discovers physical features which appear innocent,

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[87] Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, 2nd ed. (London: André Deutsch Ltd, 1968), pp. 94-5. Since their publication, Janouch's records have been a controversial source for scholars studying Kafka. Many Kafka scholars quote freely from them, believing them to be authentic. At the time of their publication, Max Brod – Kafka's friend and executor, and Dora Dyment – Kafka's final romantic interest, confirmed their authenticity. However, a number of other Kafka scholars have since cast doubt on their reliability. These include William J. Dodd, *Kafka and Dostoevsky: The Shaping of Influence* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992), p. 4; & Roy Pascal, "Critical Approaches to Kafka" in Angel Flores, ed., *The Kafka Debate: New Perspectives for our Time* (New York: Gordian Press, 1977), p. 46. In using Janouch as evidence for Kafka's familiarity with Chesterton, I am presuming at least a degree of reliability in Janouch, which, given the circumstances, seems reasonable.

[88] Kingsley Amis, "Four Fluent Fellows: An Essay on Chesterton's Fiction", in Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal*, p. 35.

[89] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, pp. 45-6.

and yet turn out to be grotesque. Later on, the secretary is said to have a, "sudden, shrill voice which was as startling and discordant as his crooked smile."[90]

Other members of the Anarchist Council also appear to be physically grotesque, although in each instance, it is a normal characteristic that is distorted. What makes Tuesday grotesque, is the contrasts that Syme notices in him: "One man indeed stood out at even a superficial glance…The effect of this figure…had every diablerie that can come from the utterly grotesque. If out of that stiff tie and collar there had come abruptly the head of a cat or a dog, it could not have been a more idiotic contrast."[91] In the case of Saturday, it is his spectacles that makes him appear grotesque (a point that I discussed in the previous chapter):

> There was nothing whatever odd about him, except that he wore a pair of dark, almost opaque spectacles. It may have been merely a crescendo of nervous fancy that had gone before, but those black discs were dreadful to Syme; they reminded him of half-remembered ugly tales…They took away the key of the face…Syme even had the thought that his eyes might be covered up because they were too frightful to see.[92]

The physical grotesques of the council members culminate in the person of Sunday. Once again, Sunday is not frightening in the manner of a traditional grotesque. He is not a monster or a dragon. His grotesquerie stems from the fact that he is a man: and yet he is also something more than a man:

> His vastness did not lie only in the fact that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat…This man was planned enormously in his original proportions…His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish.[93]

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[90] *Ibid.*, p. 47.

[91] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

Sunday is certainly terrifying, but he is also comic, a combination that we have previously seen to be integral to the grotesque. He has a, "horrible, happy laughter."[94] In the chase scene that occurs towards the end of the novel, the President escapes on an elephant stolen from the local zoo. This is clearly a terrifying event: "The six unhappy detectives flung themselves into cabs and followed the elephant, sharing the terror which he spread though the long stretch of the streets."[95] At the same time, the image of a large white haired man riding through the streets of London on an elephant is also comical.

Syme is well aware that the physical grotesques he find among the council members are of the modern variety: "Each man had something about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved mirror."[96] The modern grotesque distorts the normal rather than embodying an external evil.

Kafka's famous short story, *The Metamorphosis*, expresses a similar form of the modern grotesque. Gregor Samsa turns into a giant beetle, providing an obvious example of a physical grotesque. In *The Metamorphosis*, the modern nature of Kafka's grotesque is symbolised by the role of the family. Kafka uses Gregor's family to create a sense of ambiguity as to who Gregor's real enemy is. His family help to feed him, thus keeping him alive. The same family also destroy him. Syme faces a similar difficulty in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. The physical appearance of those he meets does not make it clear whether they represent good or evil. This is the confused world of the modern grotesque. Appearance is detached from reality, and the sense of the grotesque is increased:

> Syme began to feel a new sickness and despair. The Doctor's smile and silence were not at all like the cataleptic stare and horrible silence which he had

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[94] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[95] *Ibid.*, p. 142

[96] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

> confronted in the Professor half an hour before. About the Professor's make-up and all his antics there was always something merely grotesque, like a golliwog. Syme remembered those old woes of yesterday as one remembers being afraid of Bogy in childhood. But here was daylight; here was a healthy, square-shouldered man in tweeds...[97]

The physical grotesques in Chesterton and Kafka, are both real and imagined. It is this juxtaposition that makes them so representative of the modern grotesque. The three lodgers that appear in *The Metamorphosis* illustrate this. Upon discovering Gregor, they inform Gregor's family that they wish to quit their place of lodging immediately. And yet their complaint is not particularly emotive or dramatic. They do not appear to be unduly worried by the dramatic appearance of a human beetle. While the reader finds Gregor shocking, the lodgers merely find him an inconvenience. Through this technique, Kafka makes the terror of Gregor's appearance contingent on the eyes of the beholder. The same technique recurs throughout Kafka's bizarre tale, as the fantastic occurs amid everyday reality. One of Gregor's first concerns upon discovering his metamorphosis, is the gruelling nature of his job: "'Oh God,' he thought, 'what a gruelling job I've picked! Day in, day out – on the road...I've got the torture of travelling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get intimate."[98]

A similar technique is used in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Syme struggles to understand the cause of the physical grotesques he encounters. He asks himself whether they are the result of the universe he inhabits, or simply the result of his own imagination. Syme sees Professor de Worms, and thinks that the world has turned him into a grotesque: "He really looked as if he had been twisted out of shape by the tortuous streets he had been threading."[99] Elsewhere, Syme cannot help thinking that his own imagination is responsible for the physical grotesques he perceives among the other members of the Anarchist Council: "Such were the six men who had sworn to destroy the world. Again and again Syme strove to pull together his common sense in

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[97] *Ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

[98] Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (1915; trans. Stanley Corngold, New York: Norton & Company, 1996), pp. 3-4.

[99] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 68.

their presence. Sometimes he saw for an instant that these notions were subjective..."[100]

The Grotesque World

The expression of the modern grotesque in Chesterton and Kafka goes further than the physical grotesques that we have noted so far. The whole world becomes a grotesquerie, and this is represented through the nightmarish atmosphere. In *The Man who was Thursday : A Nightmare* we are told: "For Syme thirsted first and last to get clear of the whole poisonous atmosphere."[101] One group of images that Chesterton consistently uses to express the totality of the novel's mood are the atmospheric conditions. These change with the mood of the novel. For example, the new sense of hope that concludes the tale is symbolised by Chesterton's observation that: "Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid..."[102] In the rest of the novel, the atmospheric conditions are normally ominous: "Over the whole landscape lay a luminous and unnatural discoloration..."[103] It is interesting to discover that Kafka's uses a similar image in *The Trial*. Joseph K. visits the offices of the law courts, and begins to feel faint. An official suggests, "that the gentleman's faintness is due to the atmosphere here, and the best thing to do – and what he would like best – is not to take him to the sick-room at all, but out of these offices altogether."[104] Another official tries in vain to encourage Joseph K., telling him: "By the time you've come twice or thrice you'll hardly notice how oppressive it is here."[105]

Another image used in these novels to capture the universal sense of the modern grotesque is the maze or labyrinth. In *The Trial*, the law courts are like a labyrinth for

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[100] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[101] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

[102] *Ibid.*, p. 163. Chesterton's symbolic use of colour is a subject that I return to in chapter nine.

[103] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

[104] Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925; trans. Willa & Edwin Muir, *Franz Kafka - The Complete Novels*, London: Minerva Books, 1994), p. 47.

[105] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Joseph K., in which he cannot find his way. He says to the Law-Court Attendant: "Show me the way, there are so many lobbies here, I'll never find the way."[106] In *The Castle*, the whole world is a labyrinth to K., who forever looks for a route to the Castle without success. This has led many critics to view the book as a modern *Pilgrim's Progress* in which there is no progress. Towards the end of the story, K. enters a passage that is reminiscent of a maze, symbolising his hopeless search for the Castle: "The passage was just high enough for one to walk without bending one's head. Along both sides the doors almost touched each other...At last they stopped before a door which was not in any way different from the others..."[107] In *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, a similar image describes the adventures that Sunday has led them through. Inspector Radcliffe complains that, "we five idiots were running after each other like a lot of confounded babies playing blind man's bluff."[108]

It is possible that the source for Chesterton and Kafka's image of a labyrinth-like world was Dickens' novel, *Bleak House*. In the opening page of his novel, Dickens' describes the oppressive atmosphere of London at that time, in which no one can see clearly:

> Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marches, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships: fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners...Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them...[109]

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[106] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[107] Franz Kafka, *The Castle* (1926; trans. Willa & Edwin Muir, *Franz Kafka - The Complete Novels*, London: Minerva Books, 1994), p. 411. Mark Anderson has suggested that this endless searching for something that he can never find is fundamental to Kafka's status as a modern writer: "If he is the Dante of the modern age (as Auden called him), it is because the way out of Hell is forever barred to him..." *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Hasburg Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 5.

[108] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 109.

[109] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 1.

Chesterton commented in an introduction to Dickens' novel that: "The fog of the first chapter never lifts."[110] He went on to write: "Dickens meant that twilight to be oppressive; for it was the symbol of oppression."[111] Explaining the context in which he wrote *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, Chesterton stated: "...it was in the middle of a thick London fog of these things that I sat down and tried to write this story, nearly twenty years ago."[112] The influence of *Bleak House* upon Kafka's novels, especially *The Trial*, has been discussed by Mark Spilka in chapters ten and eleven of his book, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*. The idea that the two authors found a common inspiration in *Bleak House* remains a speculative suggestion, although the circumstantial evidence is quite compelling.

Earlier on I argued that the physical grotesques in these books are essentially modern, because there is an ambiguity regarding whether or not their reality is perceived or actual. The same can be said of the nightmarish atmosphere found in these tales, in which the whole world becomes grotesque. The poisonous atmosphere in *The Man who was Thursday; A Nightmare* is contingent upon the reality of this world (as opposed to the distinct secondary world found in genres such as fairy stories[113]): "For even the most dehumanized modern fantasies depend on some older and simpler figure: the adventures may be mad, but the adventurer must be sane. The dragon without St George would not even be grotesque."[114] This is also true of *The Trial*. The grotesque unreality of Joseph K.'s arrest, conviction and sentence; is contingent upon the existence of an apparently normal man. Without Joseph K., there is no trial. The result of this grotesque universe, in which reality and fantasy combine, is that the protagonists cannot find their place in the world. Their alienation leads me on to the third aspect of the modern grotesque that I wish to look at: The Paranoid Grotesque.

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[110] G.K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911; repr. as *Chesterton on Dickens*, London: Everyman, 1992), p. 153.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 159.

[112] Chesterton, "Foreword" to Mrs Cecil Chesterton & Ralph Neale, *The Man who was Thursday: Adapted from the Novel of G.K. Chesterton,* p. 4.

[113] For a discussion of how fairy tales create a secondary world – the land of Fairie – see J.R.R. Tolkien's essay, "On Fairy Stories".

[114] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 43.

The Paranoid Grotesque

Because of the way in which the nightmare world alienates its inhabitants, it is hardly surprising that we should find an increased level of paranoia among the protagonists. As a condition, paranoia is inherently grotesque. The three aspects of the grotesque that I have previously established in chapter four are all present. There is a combination of the comic and the terrible in the beliefs that are articulated; there is a combination of reality and fantasy in the confused mind of the individual; and there is a sense of distortion or exaggeration in the individual's perception of the physical universe.

I will examine paranoia in Chesterton and Kafka's fiction via four categories, which seem to me to be integral to the paranoid mode of thinking. These are delusion, suspicion, hostility, and an exaggerated perception of personal value.[115]

The paranoid individual is deluded in the sense that he sees or perceives things that do not objectively exist. We see this illustrated in the whipping room scene that occurs during *The Trial*. Joseph K. opens the door to the bank's lumber room and discovers his original warders beings whipped. He cannot, "get the warders out of his head",[116] and yet they do not appear to exist anywhere else. No-one else at the bank notices the whipping. Delusion is also a problem that Syme suffers from in the Wood:

> Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside), seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people...Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed? The Marquis had taken off his nose and turned out to be a

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[115] These four categories are a shortened adaptation of seven categories suggested by David Swanson & Philip Bohnert & Jackson Smith in the introductory chapter to their book, *The Paranoid* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970). The seven characteristics they list are: projective thinking; hostility; suspiciousness; centrality; delusions; fear of loss of autonomy; grandiosity. (pp. 8-19.)

[116] Kafka, *The Trial*, p. 57.

> detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to be a hobgoblin?[117]

Chesterton explains that delusional thinking is the natural consequence of the philosophy of Impressionism: "For Gabriel Syme had found in the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe."[118] Stephen Medcalf underlines the centrality of this idea in Chesterton's thought: "He was haunted by a constant fear of discovering that there is no real link between our selves and things: or that there is no world external to our selves, that only our selves exist."[119]

Delusion is also prevalent in *The Castle*. K. constantly searches for Klamm and the Castle, without ever finding them. He begins to wonder whether or not he is deluding himself. Early on in the novel, K. catches a glimpse of Klamm through a peephole in the bar.[120] But the only reason he believes that the figure he sees is Klamm, is that Frieda tells him it is. As both K. and the reader subsequently discover, Frieda is not the most reliable of sources. K.'s constant inability to find Klamm only heightens his belief that he must exist. Without a 'floor to his universe', K. becomes increasingly deluded.

The second trait within paranoia is a suspicion of everyone and everything. This is one of the most disturbing aspects of *The Trial*. The narration of the opening lines casts suspicion on the fairness of Joseph K.'s arrest: "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning."[121] As the story unfolds, Joseph K. becomes increasingly distrusting of the offers of help that he receives. This can be seen in his relationship with the Advocate. Joseph K. eventually becomes so suspicious, that he dismisses his Advocate: "At long last K. had made up his mind to take his case out of the Advocate's hands. He could not

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[117] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, pp. 112-3.

[118] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[119] Stephen Medcalf, "The Achievement of G.K. Chesterton", in Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal*, p. 81.

[120] Kafka, *The Castle*, p. 296.

[121] Kafka, *The Trial*, p. 13.

quite rid himself of doubts about the wisdom of this step, but his conviction of its necessity prevailed."[122]

Suspicion also characterises the relationship between the members of the Anarchist Council in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Each of the six council members believes that he is the lone detective among a council of murdering anarchists. When Professor de Worms asks Syme whether he is a policeman, Syme denies it, only to discover that his mistrust is misplaced. The problem for Syme is that he feels isolated, which makes him even more suspicious than he might otherwise be: "Syme was ready to believe anything about the perversion of this dehumanized brotherhood..."[123]

Another trait in paranoia is hostility, or believing the whole world to be against you. This is what frightens Syme and his fellow detectives as they make their last stand on the beach. Syme voices their common understanding of the situation, when he declares that: "The power of this whole planet is against us..."[124] This perception results from the central tenet of Kafka and Chesterton's nightmare. The protagonists believe that they are alone in a hostile universe. This is the "prison of pessimism",[125] that Chesterton depicts in his nightmare. A sense of the world conspiring against the individual also dominates *The Trial*. It is reinforced when Titorelli explains to Joseph K. that no-one can ultimately help to acquit him. Joseph K.'s isolation is also felt by Gabriel Syme: "Through all this ordeal his root horror had been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally."[126] At this point, the distinction between Chesterton and Kafka emerges. Whereas Syme gradually discovers that he is not alone on the Anarchist Council, *The Trial* concludes with Joseph K.'s execution. Joseph K.'s hostility is ultimately shown to have been justified.

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[122] *Ibid.*, p. 96.

[123] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 64.

[124] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[125] Chesterton, "Foreword" to Mrs Cecil Chesterton & Ralph Neale, *The Man who was Thursday: Adapted from the Novel of G.K. Chesterton,* p. 4.

[126] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 78.

The final ingredient of paranoia is an exaggerated perception of personal value. This can either be in the sense of believing yourself to be more important than you are, or it can involve believing yourself to be worthless. In the fiction of Chesterton and Kafka, the paranoid individual normally has no self worth. Self worth always has some external frame of reference. This comes either from outside praise, or from our own perception of an ability to do something relating to the outside world. Thus the solipsist rejection of the outside world undermines the normal basis for assessing personal value. Syme illustrates this when he encounters Impressionism in the wood: "That tragic self-confidence which he had felt when he believed that the Marquis was a devil had strangely disappeared now that he knew that the Marquis was a friend".[127] Syme's self confidence goes from one extreme to another, as he struggles to find a floor to the universe. Inspector Radcliffe is also affected by the alien universe in which he finds himself. He exclaims, "we are not much, my boy, in Sunday's universe."[128] A similar instance occurs at the end of *The Trial*. Having had his self confidence stripped away by a universe that no longer makes sense, Joseph K. utters his final words as the knife is thrust into his heart: "'Like a dog!' he said: it was as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him."[129]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Chesterton considered solipsism to be at the heart of Modernism, a point that he illustrated through the modern grotesque in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. He believed solipsism to be a direct consequence of the work of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Impressionism; and he thought that it had come to the fore with the *fin de siècle* of the 1890's. Chesterton's perspective is one specific slant on Modernism, but it seems to be justified. It was central to Nietzsche, who might be seen as a spokesman for Modernism: "...what Nietzsche actually says is that the thing-in-itself is nonsense. There are only appearances and relationships...It is on

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[127] *Ibid.*, p. 112.

[128] *Ibid.*, p. 111.

[129] Kafka, *The Trial*, p. 128.

account of this attitude, among others, that Nietzsche might be regarded as the poet's philosopher."[130]

Chesterton believed that solipsism was a nightmarish state to be in. In *The Defendant* he wrote:

> And in modern times this terror of one's self, of the weakness and mutability of one's self, has perilously increased...Now, it is this horrible fairy tale of a man constantly changing into other men that is the soul of the decadence...And the end of all this is that maddening horror of unreality which descends upon the decadents, and compared with which physical pain itself would have the freshness of a youthful thing.[131]

Gabriel Gale makes a similar point in *The Poet and the Lunatics*: "Anybody who has been in that centre of the cosmos knows that it is to be in hell."[132] This was a nightmare with which Chesterton was personally familiar.[133] As we saw in the previous chapter, the fact that the worst of the fears are internal rather than external does not diminish the terror involved: "Now I fancy that if everyone of those queer indestructible dreads were sympathetically examined it would be found that in each case the core of the terror was spiritual."[134]

Chesterton's similarity to Kafka exists in his use of aspects of the modern grotesque to express the nightmare of modernity. Where the two writers differ is in their response to this nightmare. For Kafka, the nightmare is perpetual. Whether his stories are considered nihilist or existential, the nightmare remains, and the individual is always alienated from the universe. In contrast, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* expresses a nightmare that Chesterton gradually emerged from. Chesterton came to

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[130] May, *Nietzsche and Modern Literature*, p. 3.

[131] Chesterton, *The Defendant*, pp. 33-4.

[132] G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson, 1962), p. 91.

[133] For an illustration of Chesterton's personal acquaintance with the nightmare, see his poem "The Mirror of Madman", written in the mid to late 1890's.

[134] G.K. Chesterton, "Fear", *The Daily News* (6 August, 1910; repr. in *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 23 No. 4, November 1997), p. 403. In a similar vein is Chesterton's comment on the evil figures that appear in the writing of George MacDonald: "When the evil things besieging us do appear, they do not appear outside but inside." G.K. Chesterton, "George MacDonald", *G.K.C. as M.C.* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1929), pp. 165-6.

believe that the universe was not as bleak as had been suggested in the *fin de siècle*. Syme thinks to himself: "The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream."[135] In the final chapter, I will go on to consider the solution to the nightmare that finally enabled Chesterton to see the universe in a more positive light. However, before I do so, I want to address the second of my two original questions concerning evil – the question of why it exists. This is a question that Syme wrestles with in the final chapter of *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*. It is only when he begins to answer this question, that he is truly able to put the nightmare behind him.

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[135] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 7.

Chapter 7: The Problem of Evil and the Free Will Defence

In the four previous chapters, I examined Chesterton's understanding of the privative nature of evil and his use of the grotesque as a means for expressing this in his fiction. The privative understanding of evil has significant consequences for the origin of evil. Frederick Copleston explains: "If God created all things, and evil is a thing, we should have to say that God created evil directly…But if evil is a privation, it is not necessary to speak of it as having been created by God on the grounds that God created all things."[1] The principle of causality extends to all things that begin to exist,[2] but according to the theory of privation, evil is not a thing that exists in any ontological sense. Therefore, as Frederick Copleston points out, evil does not have to be caused as such. Anthony Kenny, another Aquinas scholar, makes the same point: "Evils are in a manner uncaused, because they are not realities in the same way as good things are…"[3]

Although the theory of privation might avoid the need for any direct formal cause, it does not fully account for the origin of evil. Aquinas admitted this in his treatise, *On Evil*:

> Nevertheless evil must have a cause in some way. For it is clear that since evil is not something existing of itself but inheres in something as a privation – which is a lack of that which a thing is designed by nature to have but does not have – that it is not of a thing's nature that it be evil…But anything which does not belong naturally to a thing must have some cause…[4]

The question of where evil comes from cannot be ignored. Douglas Geivett, in his analysis of Aquinas on this subject, provides some indication of the sort of solution that we are looking for: "In other words, a privation as such is susceptible to neither a

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[1] F.C. Copleston, *Aquinas* (1955; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 151.

[2] This definition is taken from William Lane Craig. See William Lane Craig & Quentin Smith, *Theism, Atheism and Big Bang Cosmology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 4.

[3] Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 11.

[4] St Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil* (Trans. Jean Oesterle, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 21.

formal cause nor a final cause. Hence, the proper way to speak of the cause of evil, if evil is a privation, is 'by way of an agent, not directly, but accidentally'."[5]

In this chapter I will examine the way in which Chesterton dealt with the origin of evil. Following Aquinas (and the wider Catholic tradition), Chesterton explained the origin of evil 'by way of an agent'. The doctrine of free will explains how moral agents are responsible for the evil that we find in the world. I will begin by outlining what has come to be known as the Free Will Defence, showing how Chesterton can be seen as a part of this theological tradition. I will then go on to look at two areas in which Chesterton's understanding of free will can be seen: his rejection of determinism, and his belief in the doctrine of the Fall. This will lead us to reflect critically upon the Free Will Defence, and consider the extent to which it provides a satisfactory explanation of the origin of evil. Before drawing this chapter to a conclusion, I will look at two other issues that are raised by this discussion: natural evil, and the role of Satan.

A History Of The Free Will Defence

As with any apology, the Free Will Defence is given in response to something. In this case, it is given in response to the charge of logical incoherence that is levelled against theism.[6] Gerard Hughes explains:

> At its simplest, the problem of evil can be put like this: is it possible to reconcile the existence of evil in the world with the existence of a God who is morally admirable, omnipotent, and omniscient?...If God is omniscient, he knows what this world is like; if he is omnipotent, he could either have created it differently in the first place, or intervened to correct it; and if he does neither of these things, he would seem to be morally at fault, and hence not good."[7]

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[5] Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 20.

[6] My focus in this chapter is on the logical problem of evil. In the next chapter, I will examine the way in which the Free Will Defence engages with both the evidential and existential forms of the problem of evil.

[7] Gerard Hughes, *The Nature of God* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 153.

Orthodox Christian theology, rejecting any suggestion of dualism, argues that God is the creator of everything, and thus that creation is good. While privation might explain how evil can co-exist in a world made by God, there is still the need to explain how God allowed evil to come about, especially in light of his omniscience.[8] The problem is this: "We believe that everything that exists comes from the one God, and yet we believe that God is not the cause of sins. What is troubling is that if you admit that sins come from the souls that God created, and those souls come from God, pretty soon you'll be tracing those sins back to God."[9]

Aquinas explains how the Free Will Defence is used to defend the coherence of theism: "...sin is caused by the free will according as it turns away from God. Hence it does not follow that God is the cause of sin, although He is the cause of free will."[10] The argument is simply this; that God gave mankind free will, and that it was through the misuse of this free will that sin and evil entered the world. Therefore, because mankind chose to sin by disobeying God, God cannot be held responsible for the evil that resulted.

The Free Will Defence primarily relates to moral evil as opposed to natural evil: "The former is evil that results from some human being's going wrong with respect to an action that is morally significant for him; any other evil is natural evil."[11] In the philosophy of religion, the focus has been on moral evil,[12] and this is certainly where Chesterton and Aquinas' interests lie. However, as I will show later on in this chapter, a

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[8] The way in which we understand God's omniscience effects the way in which we understand the interaction between free will and providence. This is a subject to which I return in chapter eight.

[9] St Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* (Trans. Thomas Williams, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), p. 3.

[10] Aquinas, *On Evil*, p. 106.

[11] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 166. Most philosophers do not differ significantly in their definition of the two. For example, John Hick defines moral evil as "evil that we human beings originate", and natural evil as "the evil that originates independently of human actions". John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 3rd ed.(London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), p. 12. Also, see J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 162.

[12] In his comprehensive assessment of theodicy, Barry Whitney notes that, "there has not been as much work [comparatively]" on natural evil. Barry L. Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil 1960-1990* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1993), p. 123.

number of thinkers believe that the Free Will Defence can be extended to cover natural evil as well as moral evil.

In recent years, Alvin Plantinga has been the most important exponent of the Free Will Defence.[13] In his "Self profile", Plantinga notes that the first use of the phrase 'Free Will Defence' was by the atheist Anthony Flew, in his essay, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom".[14] However, as Plantinga readily acknowledges, the essence of the Free Will Defence is not original to the twentieth century. In various guises, it has been the historic response to evil by orthodox Christianity since the church began.[15] Plantinga notes that Augustine used a form of the Free Will Defence,[16] and we have already seen Aquinas' articulation of it. Along with theologians, many Christian literary writers have utilised the Free Will Defence in some form. In this respect, Brian Horne has pointed out that the theological foundation upon which Dante's *Inferno* is built is "the doctrine of free will".[17] John Milton also participates in this tradition, which is evident in *Paradise Lost*, and, even more so in *Areopagitica*.[18] In the twentieth century, advocates of the Free Will Defence include Charles Williams,[19] and C.S. Lewis. Indeed, Lewis based his apologetic work, *The Problem of Pain*, on a version of the Free Will Defence: "...Christianity asserts that God is good; that He made all things good and for the sake of their goodness; that one of the good things He made, namely,

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[13] This observation is made on the grounds that he is consistently cited by other writers as the main authority on the Free Will Defence. (e.g. See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 365-371. & J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, pp. 162-176.)

[14] James Tomberlin & Peter Van Inwagen, ed., *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), p. 41. Flew's essay can be found in A. Flew & A. MacIntyre, ed., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955).

[15] While the Free Will Defence has been the dominant theodicy in church history, it has not been the only theodicy. For example, in recent years, John Hick has argued that an alternative theodicy can be traced back to the thought of Irenaeus. See Hick, "Part 3: The Irenaean Type of Theodicy", *Evil and the God of Love*.

[16] The way in which Augustine did so is further developed by G.R. Evans in her book, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[17] Brian Horne, *Imagining Evil* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), p. 58.

[18] For a more detailed discussion of Milton's emphasis on free will, see Dennis Richard Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially "Chapter 4: Milton and the Free Will Defence". In addition, C.S. Lewis offers an interesting discussion of Milton and St Augustine, in chapter ten of his book, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (1942; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[19] Brian Horne says that Charles Williams, "located evil firmly in the place in which both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas located it: the human will.", *Imagining Evil*, p. 109.

the free will of rational creatures, by its very nature included the possibility of evil: and that creatures, availing themselves of this possibility, have become evil."[20]

Chesterton is also an integral part of this classical Christian tradition. His emphasis on free will has prompted Thomas Peters to declare: "...Chesterton's very conception of God and his philosophy of humanity took the free will of the human being as a foundational article of faith."[21] The philosopher Quentin Lauer, sees a similar train of thought within the writing of Chesterton. He explains that for Chesterton, "if evil is to exist at all it has to be introduced by beings who are more than merely natural, beings who alone can in the moral sense be either good or evil, precisely because they can both know and freely will."[22] Peters and Lauer are able to place Chesterton within the free will tradition because Chesterton is so adamant about his own position. In his essay, "The Outline of Liberty", Chesterton explains the centrality of free will in accounting for the origin of evil in this world: "Will made the world; Will wounded the world; the same Divine Will gave to the world for the second time its chance, the same human Will can for the last time make its choice."[23]

Chesterton's belief in the significance of free will was one of the things that attracted him to Aquinas:

> And in exactly this sense he emphasised a certain dignity in Man, which was sometimes rather swallowed up in the purely theistic generalisations about God...But let us not forget that its upshot was that very Free Will, or moral responsibility of Man, which so many modern liberals would deny. *Upon this sublime and perilous liberty hang heaven and hell, and all the mysterious drama of the soul.*[24] [italics mine]

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[20] C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (1940; repr. London: The Centenary Press, 1946), p. 57.

[21] Thomas Peters, *Battling for the Modern Mind: A Beginner's Chesterton* (Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), p. 151.

[22] Quentin Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher Without Portfolio* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), p. 53.

[23] G.K. Chesterton, "The Outline of Liberty", *The Common Man* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1950), p. 236.

[24] G.K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933; repr. London: Hodder Stoughton, 1938), pp. 38-9.

Chesterton was critical of those who rejected the doctrine of free will, hence his qualified praise of the optimistic theism he heard from Stopford Brooke,[25] during his youth: "It was a full and substantial faith in the Fatherhood of God, and little could be said against it, even in theological theory, except that it rather ignored the free-will of man."[26] Chesterton's belief in the inadequacy of any theory which ignores free will can also be seen in "The Doom of the Darnaways". Father Brown has to remind those around him that free will is of fundamental importance in explaining what has taken place: "It was murder; but murder is of the will, which God made free."[27]

Chesterton's belief that free will was an essential part of our humanness led him to conclude that it could not be overridden. Our will could be influenced and affected by external factors, but ultimately, man was responsible for his own actions. Father Brown observes: "A man isn't fated to fall into the smallest venial sin, let alone into crimes like suicide and murder. You can't be made to do wicked things against your will because your name is Darnaway..."[28] This belief in man's free will meant that Chesterton was unwilling to blame our sin on Satan and his cohorts. Having free will meant that the choice to do either right or wrong, was finally ours: "You don't think the holy angels took him and hung him on a garden tree, do you? And as for the unholy angels – no, no, no. The men who did this did a wicked thing, but they went no further than their own wickedness..."[29] Chesterton was quick to defend human responsibility, which explains his attraction to Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*: "I think 'Macbeth' the one supreme drama because it is the one Christian drama...I mean by Christian (in this matter) the strong sense of spiritual liberty and of sin, the idea that the best man can be as bad as he chooses...You cannot call Macbeth anything but a victim of Macbeth. The evil spirits tempt him, but they never force him..."[30] Chesterton reinforces this view

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[25] Stopford Brooke was the Unitarian minister at Bedford Chapel, where Chesterton used to go as a child with his father.

[26] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 174.

[27] G.K. Chesterton, "The Doom of the Darnaways", *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926, repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1958), p. 165.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 159. Darnaway is the name of the family in Chesterton's tale who are supposed to be cursed.

[29] G.K. Chesterton, "The Miracle of Moon Crescent", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 93.

[30] G.K. Chesterton, "Free Will in Life and in the Drama", *The Illustrated London News* (1912; repr. *Collected Works Volume 29: The Illustrated London News 1911-1913*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 260.

through the words of Father Brown: "Anybody can be wicked – as wicked as he chooses. We can direct our moral wills…"[31]

Chesterton's Rejection Of Determinism

In 1908, Chesterton wrote: "According to most philosophers, God in making the world enslaved it. According to Christianity, in making it, He set it free."[32] Inherent within this affirmation of human freedom is a rejection of determinism, which is interesting to explore. Determinism may be defined as the belief, "that every event and state of affairs is 'causally necessitated' by preceding events and states of affairs".[33] Deterministic theories can take different forms. For example, biological determinism argues that our D.N.A. determines our actions, while behaviourism suggests that we are determined by the conditioning of our environment.[34] In Chesterton's novel *Manalive*, the character Arthur Inglewood describes his belief in the inevitability of determinism: "Nothing can ever alter it; it's in the wheels of the universe…"[35]

Chesterton's rejection of determinism stemmed from his realisation of its consequences. Taken to its logical conclusion, determinism argues that the future is already fixed, thus absolving man of any moral responsibility for his actions. A.J. Ayer once wrote that, "it is only when it is believed that I could have acted otherwise that I am held to be morally responsible for what I have done."[36] If we are determined. we could not have acted otherwise, and thus we cannot be held to be morally responsible.

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[31] G.K. Chesterton, "The Strange Crime of John Boulnois", *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914: repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 181.

[32] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908: repr. London: The Bodley Head, 1927), p. 141.

[33] Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 2. Elsewhere, determinism is defined as the thesis that, "any event of any kind is an effect of a prior series of effects, a causal chain with every link solid", a thesis in which, "future events are as fixed and unalterable as the past is fixed and unalterable". Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 194.

[34] One famous example of a scientific determinist in the area of biology is Francis Crick, the co-discoverer of D.N.A. The most famous behaviourist is probably B.F. Skinner.

[35] G.K. Chesterton, *Manalive* (1912; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 34.

[36] A.J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity" in Watson, ed., *Free Will*, p. 15.

This interpretation of determinism is one that takes the theory to its logical extreme. but Chesterton thought that this was unavoidable. In his story, "The Wrong Shape", this is the basis upon which Dr James Harris commits murder. Harris confesses: "I am a man who has ever since boyhood believed in Nature and in all natural functions and instincts, whether man called them moral or immoral."[37]

Chesterton not only thought that determinism threatened morality; he also believed that it was a meaningless philosophy of life. In *Orthodoxy* he wrote: "The determinists come to bind, not to loose. They may well call their law the 'chain' of causation. It is the worst chain that ever fettered a human being."[38] Without free will, man's life is no longer meaningful, for there can be no hope. Boethius explained: "It is pointless, therefore, to hope for anything or pray to escape anything. What can a man hope for, or pray to escape, when an inflexible bond binds all that can be wished for?"[39] In *Orthodoxy* ("Chapter 2: The Maniac"), Chesterton suggests that this is one of the causes of madness. He also alludes to this point in his *Autobiography*: "It was the Determinist who told me, at the top of his voice, that I could not be responsible at all. And as I rather like being treated as a responsible being, and not as a lunatic let out for the day, I began to look around for some spiritual asylum that was not merely a lunatic asylum."[40]

Chesterton's dislike of determinism was not confined to his arguments with the scientific materialists. Chesterton saw Calvinism and superstitious fatalism as two other branches of determinism. (By superstitious fatalism, I mean the superstition that results from a belief in the pervasive power of fate.) In "The Outline of Liberty" he declared: "The instant a breach, or even a crack, had been made in the dyke of Catholicism, there poured through it the bitter sea of Calvinism, or in other words, of a very cruel form of fatalism. Since that time, it has taken the much duller form of Determinism."[41] John

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[37] G.K. Chesterton, "The Wrong Shape", *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911; repr. *The Annotated Innocence of Father Brown*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 156.

[38] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 41.

[39] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Trans. V.E. Watts, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 153.

[40] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 182.

[41] Chesterton, "The Outline of Liberty", *The Common Man*, p. 237.

Martin notes that Chesterton saw Calvinism as, "a kind of determinism in theological costume".[42] The link that Chesterton made between determinism and Calvinism is also acknowledged by Quentin Lauer: "...he chose as his favourite adversaries certain scientists with their advocacy of determinism and the Calvinists with their advocacy of predestinationism..."[43]

Chesterton intensely disliked Calvinism, a form of Christianity that he considered "atrocious".[44] Indeed, his dislike of Calvinism seems to have been a well known point of jest among his friends. Martin Gardner notes that Chesterton's friend, Max Beerbohm, once drew a cartoon which depicted Hillaire Belloc trying to convert Chesterton from the errors of Calvinism.[45] In rejecting Calvinism, Chesterton often painted an extreme caricature of his opponents position, as I will go on to illustrate. An exaggerated description of his opponents ideas is a common trait in Chesterton's writings, and has led some critics to suggest that it indicates a failure on Chesterton's part to appreciate what it is that his opponents are trying to say. Yet this is not necessarily the case. We have already noted that Chesterton was an extremely symbolic writer and thinker.[46] A lack of interest in detail does not equate to a failure to understand detail. Depending on one's perspective, we might either conclude that Chesterton misunderstood Calvinism, or that his caricature was remarkably perceptive.

The main reason for Chesterton's objection to Calvinism was that he considered it heretical.[47] In his story, "Hammer of God", Chesterton even goes as far as suggesting

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[42] John Martin, "Some Theological Implications of Chesterton's Style", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 5. No. 1 (1978-9), p. 136.

[43] Lauer, G.K. Chesterton: *Philosopher Without Portfolio*, p. 102.

[44] G.K. Chesterton, "The New Theology and Modern Thought", *The Illustrated London News* (1907; repr. *Collected Works 27: The Illustrated London News 1905-1907*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 424.

[45] Recorded by Martin Gardner in his annotated notes to Chesterton, *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 240.

[46] See chapter two.

[47] Chesterton understood heresy as something slightly different from the normal interpretation of the word. For Chesterton, the words 'wrong' and 'heretical' were practically interchangeable. His use of the term as a label for any opinion with which he disagreed can be seen in his book, *Heretics* (1905), as can his jovial use of the term.

that the blacksmith, a Calvinistic Presbyterian, is not a Christian.[48] Chesterton's concern for defending orthodoxy against modern heresies is clearly evident in his book *Heretics*. In *St Thomas Aquinas* he explained exactly why he considered Calvinism to be heretical: "The old Manicheans taught that Satan originated the whole work of creation commonly attributed to God. The new Calvinists taught that God originated the whole work of damnation commonly attributed to Satan."[49] Other thinkers have shared Chesterton's concern with the fact that Calvinism, with its "concept of constitutional depravity and volitional determinism makes God the author of sin."[50]

At this point it is helpful to comment on Chesterton's rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of constitutional depravity. Chesterton did not believe that man was inherently wicked and unable to choose to do good. However, despite his belief in free will, he did believe that man had a sinful nature. Augustine explained how these two beliefs could be reconciled using the analogy of a pair of scales, with equal balance pans: one representing good and one representing evil.[51] Free will involves man weighing up the choice of good and evil, and then acting accordingly. Augustine argued that since the Fall, our sinful nature meant that man's weighing scales were weighted in favour of evil. Although man remained free to choose either good or evil, the scales now had a bias towards evil. In the fifth century, Pelagius had argued, to use the analogy, that the scales remained evenly balanced after the Fall. Thus Pelagius rejected the idea that original sin had resulted in a sinful nature. In *The Everlasting Man*, Chesterton referred to Pelagius' ideas as the opposite heresy to Manicheism.[52]

The other reason that Chesterton disliked Calvinism was that he considered it morbid.[53] It was totally opposed to his optimistic outlook on life.[54] As I have already noted,

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[48] Chesterton, "The Hammer of God" *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 194.

[49] Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 124.

[50] C. Samuel Storms, *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Langham: University of America Press, 1985), p. 207.

[51] The analogy that follows is highlighted by Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), pp. 372-373.

[52] G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925; repr. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 229.

[53] It should be pointed out that Calvinists would not have agreed with Chesterton's prognosis.

[54] See my discussion of Chesterton's optimism in chapter nine.

Chesterton believed that determinism made life essentially meaningless. This was also true of Calvinism. If God had already determined the future, as Calvinism appeared to suggest, then life seemed pointless and futile. Chesterton could not help but notice, "the sense of doom in the Calvinist".[55] This also explains the physical caricature that Chesterton had of Calvinists: "Yet his wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles...made it hard to believe, somehow, that he had even been anything so morbid as...a Calvinist."[56]

In his essay on the difference between Chesterton and Thomas Hardy, Brocard Sewell describes how Chesterton disliked the morbid atmosphere he found in Hardy's novels (e.g. *Jude the Obscure*). Sewell goes on to connect Hardy's pessimism with Calvinism, when he quotes the Hardy critic, John Heath-Stubbs: "The rule of Hardy's universe is the cruel predestinating deity of Calvinism..."[57] Following Hardy's death, Chesterton wrote an article in which he admitted that he did not sympathise with Hardy's philosophy of life.[58]

Chesterton saw superstitious fatalism as another branch of Determinism, in the same mould as scientific materialism and Calvinism. Father Brown describes the similarity: "I don't see a pin to choose between your scientific superstition and the other magical superstition. They both seem to end in turning people into paralytics, who can't move their own legs or arms to save their own lives or souls."[59] Father Brown warns: "It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition."[60] Father Brown's dislike of superstition is a constant surprise to those around him who expect him to be superstitious by virtue of his faith.

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[55] Chesterton, "The Honour of Israel Gow", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 121.

[56] Chesterton, "The Three Tools of Death", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 240.

[57] Quoted in Brocard Sewell, "Thomas Hardy and G.K. Chesterton: A Sketch in Two Temperaments", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 5 No.1 (1978-9), p. 108.

[58] *Ibid.*, p.117. Chesterton's ambivalent relationship with Thomas Hardy can be seen in G.K. Chesterton, "The Great Victorian Novelists", *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913; repr. London: Williams & Norgate, 1923).

[59] Chesterton, "The Doom of the Darnaways", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 165.

[60] Chesterton, "The Oracle of the Dog", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 70.

He constantly has to put them straight: "You see, I am not superstitious."[61] Father Brown goes on to explain that, "Superstition is irreligious".[62] This is because of the way in which it abuses the Christian idea of mystery. Within Christian theology, mystery has a legitimate function, as I will explore in the next chapter. However, when nothing is explained, and everything is consigned to the realm of mystery, a belief is superstitious rather than Christian. This is at the heart of Father Brown's admonition in "The Purple Wig": "I know the Unknown God...I know his name; it is Satan. The true God was made flesh and dwelt among us. And I say to you, wherever you find men ruled merely by mystery, it is the mystery of iniquity."[63]

Chesterton & The Fall

In his discussion of the Father Brown stories, Frederick J. Crosson writes:

> The labyrinth which is our puzzle as readers is the work of evil, and Father Brown's unique power to map the labyrinth is not due to any religious intuition but to natural insight into the human heart, an insight made more penetrating by what his religion has disclosed to him of the malice of which every child of Adam is capable.[64]

Crosson is referring to the methodology of Father Brown which I dealt with in chapter three – Father Brown identifies with the human heart which he knows to be sinful. However, Crosson's comments also allude to the belief upon which this methodology is based. Father Brown thinks that humans are sinful because he subscribes to the doctrine of original sin, which he understands as the consequence of the Fall.

Chesterton revealed the means by which man misused his free will in the closing pages of his book, *The Everlasting Man*, where he described a "strange story of treason in

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[61] G.K. Chesterton, "The Blast of the Book", *The Scandal of Father Brown* (1935; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 61.

[62] Chesterton, "The Wrong Shape", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 147.

[63] Chesterton, "The Purple Wig", *The Wisdom of Father Brown*, p. 118.

[64] Frederick J. Crosson, "Father Brown, Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Man", Rufus William Rauch, ed., *A Chesterton Celebration* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 28.

heaven and the great desertion by which evil damaged and tried to destroy a cosmos that it could not create."[65] The doctrine of original sin explained that the reason why men were sinful was that they descended from sinful ancestors who had used their freedom to turn away from God.[66] The centrality of this doctrine in Chesterton's thinking is also highlighted by Brocard Sewell: "For one thing, Chesterton believed, as an orthodox Christian, in the doctrine of Original Sin."[67] As far as Chesterton was concerned, the doctrine of original sin could not be dismissed as an irrelevant religious dogma. In actual fact, it was a fundamental part of reality:

> Men who wish to get down to fundamentals perceive that there is a fundamental problem of evil. Men content to be more superficial are also content with a superficial fuss and bustle of improvement. The man in the mere routine of modern life is content to say that a modern gallows is a relatively humane instrument or that a modern cat-o'-nine tails is milder than an ancient Roman *flagellum*. But the original thinker will ask why any scourge or gibbet was ever needed, or ever even alleged to be needed? And that brings the original thinker back to original sin."[68]

Chesterton was aware that many of his contemporaries had ceased to recognise the inherent sinfulness of man. Although it is a simple point, it is one that Father Brown has to communicate to those around him: "I have told you his secret. It is a secret of the soul. He is a bad man."[69] It is not a secret in the sense that it is hidden, but in the sense that it has been forgotten. Father Brown is quick to admit his own sinfulness: "I am a man, and therefore have all devils in my heart."[70]

Father Brown's awareness of our common sinful nature allowed him to avoid judging the criminals he caught and absolved. Indeed, as far as Father Brown is concerned, the

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[65] Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 245.

[66] It seems probable that Chesterton believed this literally – that sin was physically passed down through the generations. Although he did not discuss the point explicitly, he was keen to defend a traditional understanding of original sin. In the final chapter, I will explore the way in which he reconciled this with his belief in the innocence of childhood.

[67] Sewell, "Thomas Hardy and G.K. Chesterton", *The Chesterton Review*, p. 108.

[68] G.K. Chesterton, "On Original Sin", *Come to Think of It...* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1930), p. 155.

[69] Chesterton, "The Crime of the Communist", *The Scandal of Father Brown*, p. 113.

[70] Chesterton, "The Hammer of God", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 195.

one spiritual disease is, "thinking one is quite well".[71] This has led Garry Wills to comment that: "Man's need for absolution is the theme of the best Father Brown stories, those contained in *The Secret of Father Brown*."[72] Wills has a particularly high regard for "The Chief Mourner of Marne". In this story, Chesterton attacks those suffering from the spiritual disease of thinking that 'one is quite well'. Father Brown declares: "Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon."[73] In making this statement, Father Brown observes that those who need pardoning do not attempt to defend their crimes. Instead, they acknowledge their fault, as the doctrine of original sin teaches: "We are taught that if a man has really bad first principles, that must be partly his fault."[74]

In chapter three, I looked at the way in which the parasitic nature of evil led to a slippery slope of corruption and perversion. Chesterton was clearly aware of the extent of evil that resulted from the Fall. Father Brown comments that: "Even the most murderous blunders don't poison life like sins..."[75] Yet, in spite of his awareness of the horrific sins of which man was capable, Father Brown retained the ability to be shocked by what he encountered: "What a horrible talk of hatred! What a vengeance for one mortal to take on another! Shall we ever get to the bottom of this bottomless human heart...?"[76] The problem of the bottomless human heart is a problem for every philosopher. However much we like to believe in our progress and evolution into a higher species, the problem of moral evil remains. Perhaps this is why Chesterton was drawn towards the story of the Fall. It provided him with an explanation of the evil that

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[71] Chesterton, "The Eye of Apollo", The Innocence of Father Brown, p. 199.

[72] Gary Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 164. Although these stories do convey man's need for absolution, I would not agree with Wills that they rank as the best of the Father Brown stories.

[73] G.K. Chesterton, "The Chief Mourner of Marne", *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 168-9.

[74] Chesterton, "The Eye of Apollo", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 206.

[75] Chesterton, "The Three Tools of Death", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 252.

[76] Chesterton, "The Vanishing of Vaudrey", *The Secret of Father Brown*, p. 108.

men do, and caused him to declare that the Fall was ultimately good news rather than bad news: "Well, anyhow, it must be obvious to anybody that the doctrine of the Fall is the only *cheerful* view of human life."[77] This is because it explains that man, in his sinful state, is not what he was created to be.[78]

Elsewhere Chesterton declared: "The Fall is a view of life. It is not only the only enlightening, but the only encouraging view of life. It holds...that we have misused a good world, and not merely been entrapped into a bad one. It refers evil back to the wrong use of the will, and thus declares that it can eventually be righted by the right use of the will."[79] As we can see, Chesterton believed that the story of the Fall explained how man's misuse of free will introduced sin into the world. Chesterton was convinced that when combined with the story of the Fall, the Free Will Defence provided a satisfactory explanation of the origin of evil, as well as defending the logical coherence of Christianity. In order to understand how Chesterton justified this position, I will now go on to examine an apology for the Free Will Defence.

An Apology For The Free Will Defence

The Fall of Man, with its recognition of free will, explains the origin of the evil that is in the world, but it does not necessarily justify it. In this section my intention is to

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[77] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 179.

[78] In the concluding chapter, I shall look at the way in which Chesterton's emphasis on the doctrine of creation enabled him to reconcile his optimism with the reality of evil. For now, it is interesting to note that Chesterton was also aware of the brokeness of creation. As Thomas Hart has pointed out: "If creation is primary among Christian doctrines for Chesterton, the fall is a close second. The doctrines are correlative, together constituting what Chesterton regards as the Christian vision of the universe." Thomas N. Hart, *G.K. Chesterton's Case for Christianity* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Graduate Theological Union, 1974), p. 31. (The interplay between these ideas is something that I will return to in the concluding chapter.)

[79] G.K. Chesterton, *The Thing* (1929; repr. London: Unicorn Books, 1939), p. 220. This comment should not be interpreted as a Pelagian response to original sin. Earlier on in this chapter, we noted that Chesterton thought Pelagius to be a heretic. In this context, the 'right use of the will' presumably refers to a decision to choose the solution to sin that is found in Jesus. However, it is difficult to be sure of this in view of Chesterton's failure to elaborate on his soteriology. This is a point that I will consider further in the next chapter.

explain exactly how the Free Will Defence rescues Christianity from the charge of logical incoherence.

One of the assumptions of the Free Will Defence is that freedom is valuable. God allowed evil to enter the world because he chose to give mankind freedom, but does this justify God? This is an objection raised by Mackie, who discusses the fact that God must at least have had some awareness of what might result from his gift of freedom: "If so, he was taking, literally, a hell of a risk when he created Adam and Eve, no less than when he created Satan. Was the freedom to make unforeseeable choices so great a good that it outweighed this risk?"[80] In response, Lauer observes how Chesterton acknowledged 'God's risk', and yet considered it worthwhile: "Over against all this it is Chesterton's contention that freedom is indeed the first of God's gifts to human beings – even though a mighty risky gift. It is freedom that makes for the dignity of the human, but it is freedom too that makes for the possibility of sin."[81]

To show how God valued freedom in spite of its possible consequences, Chesterton wrote a little-known play called *The Surprise*. It was actually written in 1932, although the manuscript was not written up until after Chesterton's death, when his secretary and executor, Dorothy Collins, prepared the script for performance. The play, a "profoundly religious play dealing with the problem of free will in the context of the Creation, the Fall of Man, and the Incarnation,"[82] was first performed on 5th June 1953 at Hull University.

In the play, a character called the Author creates a number of puppets who subsequently perform a play for a visiting Friar in which they only do good. However, the Author is not satisfied with his creation. Without their freedom, there is something

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[80] Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 176. The concept of a 'greater-good' underlies the Free Will Defence, as Stephen Davis has explained: "What the FWD must insist on is, first, that the amount of evil that in the end will exist will be outweighed by the good that will then exist; and second, that this favorable balance of good over evil was obtainable by God in no other way." Stephen Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1981), p. 71. This is a subject that I return to in the next chapter.

[81] Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher Without Portfolio*, p. 101.

[82] Dennis Conlon, "Introduction", *Collected Works Volume 11: Plays, Chesterton on Shaw* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 28.

artificial about the puppets. The Author declares: "They are everything else except alive. They are intelligent, complex, combative, brilliant, bursting with life, and yet they are not alive."[83] This is at the heart of the Author's problem: "I want them to be and not to do. I want them to exist."[84] At the request of the Author, the visiting Friar asks God for a miracle, and the puppets gain their own wills. They then repeat the play that they performed in Act I, only this time, the results are very different. Chesterton's play is an analogy of God's original dilemma in creating man. He could have left man without free will and lifeless, or he could have given man free will in order that he might, "be and not merely do".

Chesterton's understanding of God's initial dilemma, which we find illustrated in *The Surprise*, was at the root of his response to the problem of evil. This is why he hints at the outline of *The Surprise* in his book, *Orthodoxy*, written twenty-four years earlier: "God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it."[85] It is interesting to note another connection to *The Surprise*, this time with C.S. Lewis.[86] Lewis wrote an essay entitled "The Obstinate Toy Soldiers",[87] that along with the notes that follow it, takes a similar approach to *The Surprise*. Like Chesterton, Lewis considers and rejects the other possibility, that God could have created a set of creatures without wills of their own; lifeless but good.

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[83] G.K. Chesterton, *The Surprise*, (1953; repr. *Collected Works Vol. 11*), p. 324.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 323.

[85] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 141.

[86] Much has been made of the connection between Lewis and Chesterton. Lewis admitted in a letter to Sheldon Vanauken that Chesterton's, *The Everlasting Man*, was the best apologetic work he knew. This is noted in an essay by Iain T. Benson, "The Influence of the Writings of G.K. Chesterton on C.S. Lewis: The Textual Part". This essay is found in an issue of the Chesterton journal that was devoted to the connection between the two writers, *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 17. No. 3-4 (August-November 1991). (The connection between these writers is also explored in the book by Michael H. Macdonald & Andrew A. Tadie, ed., *The Riddle of Joy: G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis,* London: Collins, 1989.)

[87] Found in C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; repr. London: Fontana Books, 1964). Note that this essay was originally published in 1944. Although this is after the date that *The Surprise* was written, it is before the date that *The Surprise* was performed, and therefore it appears that Lewis did not draw on Chesterton's play for his own essay.

The paradoxical relationship between freedom and happiness has often been noted. In his book, *The Literary Underground*,[88] John Hoyles discusses it under the twin signs of two of Dostoevsky's characters, 'The Grand Inquisitor' and 'The Underground Man'. This theme is also central to the novel by Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, in which the authorities try to ensure collective happiness at the expense of individual freedom. Their argument follows the Grand Inquisitor's in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, who claims credit "for at last having conquered freedom and having done so in order to make people happy."[89] When the white-robed angel presents a similar argument to MacIan *in The Ball and the Cross*, MacIan realises the true identity of the angel – Lucifer.[90] Chesterton's response to the tension between freedom and happiness is clear: "I could not cease to think that a God who made men and angels free was finer than one who coerced them into comfort."[91]

I have shown how Chesterton argued that freedom was more valuable than comfort and superficial happiness, thus justifying God's decision to give man free will. The other challenge for the Free Will Defence concerns whether or not God was able to determine man so that he would always freely choose the good. If He was able to do this, then surely it was His moral responsibility to do so. This being the case, God is morally responsible for the evil in the world. This argument, has been articulated by many philosophers, including Flew and Mackie:

1. An omnipotent God can achieve anything that is logically possible.
2. It is logically possible for a free moral creature to be constituted in such a way as to always freely choose the good.
3. Therefore, an omnipotent God could create a being who would always freely choose the good. [92]

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[88] John Hoyles, *The Literary Underground* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

[89] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; trans. David McDuff, London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 289.

[90] Chesterton, "Chapter 15: The Dream of MacIan", *The Ball and the Cross*.

[91] G.K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (1926; repr. London: Burns & Oates, 1951), p. 86.

[92] This outline of the argument is taken from Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, p. 189.

Advocates of the Free Will Defence object to point three on the grounds that contrary to point two, it is not logically possible for a free moral creature to be constituted in such a way as to always freely choose the good. Plantinga explains:

> Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all: they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creature the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing evil.[93]

Elsewhere Plantinga reminds us that, point two is wrong because if God, "*causes* them always to do only what is right, then they don't do what is right *freely*".[94] C.S. Lewis declared: "Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad."[95] Both Plantinga and Lewis agree with Aquinas, who, as Horne points out, believed the same: "It is not possible, Thomas argues, for God to have created a world in which human beings can make real, free choices and at the same time make sure that the way of rejection and negation is never chosen."[96] In *The Surprise,* the Friar puts the point even more succinctly when he explains the ultimate consequence of free will: "It is their play now."[97]

The debate we have observed between thinkers such as Mackie and Plantinga, ultimately revolves around the definition of the word freedom. While Mackie advocates a compatibilist approach, Plantinga argues for an incompatibilist understanding of freedom. Compatibilists believe, "an action is free, whether or not it was causally determined, provided only that it was done by an agent whose faculties were operating normally, and was done because the agent chose or preferred to do it."[98] Defined in this

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[93] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (1974; repr. Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991) p. 30.

[94] Plantinga, "Self Profile", in Tomberlin & Inwagen, ed., *Alvin Plantinga*, p. 41.

[95] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 48-9.

[96] Horne, *Imagining Evil*, p. 54.

[97] Chesterton, *The Surprise*, p. 325.

[98] Found in the introduction by the editors to Marilyn McCord Adams & Robert Merrihew Adams, ed., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 12.

manner, freedom is compatible with a God who has determined how the world will be (and is thus responsible for it). Incompatibilists reject this definition, believing instead that, "a free action must not only have been done because an agent whose faculties were operating normally chose or preferred to do it; the agents' choice or preference must also not have been causally determined (though it may certainly have been influenced)..."[99] Incompatibilists do not believe that free will is compatible with determinism. The debate between the Compatibilists and the Incompatibilists is one that can be traced back to the theological debate between John Calvin and Jacob Arminius.[100] While the debate continues to rage,[101] it is important to note that the Free Will Defence relies on a incompatibilist definition of freedom. As Plantinga admits, "if compatibilism is correct, the Free Will Defence fails."[102]

Natural Evil

There are several possible explanations for the origin of natural evil. However, these are not our immediate concern. Instead, I wish to look briefly at the theories that extend arguments from free will to cover natural evil as well as moral evil. Although my coverage will be brief, it will illustrate that the Free Will Defence is not necessarily limited to the sphere of moral evil. By outlining a number of logically possible

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[99] *Ibid.*, p. 12. John Moskop has noted that: "Thomas's explication of the concept of free will (liberum arbitrium) also seems much closer to the libertarian than to the compatibilist conception of freedom." John C. Moskop, *Divine Omniscience and Human Freedom: Thomas Aquinas and Charles Hartshorne* (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1984), p. 23.

[100] For a collection of responses to Calvinism that are more sympathetic to Arminianism, see Clark Pinnock, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989).

[101] For a compatibilist response to Plantinga, see Nelson Pike, "Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action", *The Philosophical Review* 74 (1965), and Nelson Pike, "Divine Foreknowledge, Human Freedom and Possible Worlds", *The Philosophical Review* 86 (1977). For a defence of Plantinga against Pike's criticism, see Philip L. Quinn, "Plantinga on Foreknowledge and Freedom", in Tomberlin & Inwagen, ed., *Alvin Plantinga*. In addition, see my discussion of chance and providence in chapter eight.

[102] Plantinga, "Self Profile", in Tomberlin & Inwagen, ed., *Alvin Plantinga*, p. 45. Bruce Reichenbach has argued that The Free Will Defence causes a particular problem for Calvinist and Reformed theologians: "...the argument from evil seems particularly telling against one important and influential theistic tradition which, in its traditional formulation, rejects the libertarian view of freedom." Bruce Reichenbach, "Evil and a Reformed View of God", *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* Vol. 24 (1988), p. 82.

arguments, I will demonstrate that the Free Will Defence is comprehensive in its explanation of the origin of evil.

Bruce Reichenbach and Stuart Hackett both see natural evil as a natural part of a free universe. Reichenbach explains how this results from a belief in free will:

> This creation, in order to make possible the existence of moral agents (in this case, human persons), had to be ordered according to some set of natural laws. Consequently, the possibility arises that sentient creatures like ourselves can be negatively affected by the outworking of these laws in nature, such that we experience pain, suffering, disability, disutility, and at times the frustration of our good desires."[103]

Aquinas argues along similar lines when he explains that evils (both natural and voluntary), are an inevitable by-product of God's creation. He writes: "Now, the order of the universe requires…that there should be some things that can, and do sometimes, fail. And thus God, by causing in things the good of the order of the universe, consequently and as it were by accident, causes the corruption of things…"[104]

Richard Swinburne takes a slightly different approach to natural evil. He believes that for humans to be significantly free to commit moral evil, they must possess a knowledge of good and evil. Without this, their choices are not truly free. Natural evils exist to provide humans with the knowledge of evil that is a necessary part of their freedom. Swinburne writes: "…I believe that the occurrence of natural evils (i.e. evils such as disease and accidents unpredictable by humans) is required for humans to have the power to choose between doing significantly good or evil to their fellows…"[105]

A more speculative explanation of natural evil concerns the role of fallen angels (i.e. Satan and his cohorts). Plantinga outlines this position: "All natural evil is due to the

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[103] Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p. 101.

[104] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 49, Article 2 (Vol. 1, Trans. English Dominican Fathers, London: Burns & Oates, 1947), p. 255.

[105] Richard Swinburne, "Some Major Strands of Theodicy", in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 31. Also, see Swinburne's article "Natural Evil" and the response by Eleonore Stump, "Knowledge, Freedom, and the Problem of Evil", in Michael L. Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

free activity of non-human persons; there is a balance of good over evil with respect to the actions of these non-human persons; and there is no world God could have created which contains a more favourable balance of good over evil with respect to the free activity of the non-human persons it contains."[106] This is a line of thought that Plantinga finds in St Augustine.[107] Plantinga chooses to leave his suggestion at a more general level rather than make a specific reference to the fall of Satan from heaven that is implied in the Bible. However, the idea that natural evil is the result of fallen angels exercising their free will in opposition to God, is one that easily fits into the biblical narrative. As we noted earlier in this chapter, Chesterton believed that evil could be explained by a "strange story of treason in heaven and the great desertion by which evil damaged and tried to destroy a cosmos".[108] Although this account of natural evil is an extension of the Free Will Defence that is quite convenient; that does not guarantee its truth. Indeed, Eleonore Stump notes Richard Swinburne's objection on these grounds: "This suggestion he also rejects, on the grounds that the hypothesis of the existence and evil action of fallen angels is blatantly *ad hoc*; there is no independent evidence for the hypothesis, and it seems to have been brought in just to handle this otherwise intractable problem."[109]

The Fall of man is also at the heart of another 'ad hoc' account that holds sin responsible for natural evil:

> It is the voluntary break with God which makes the human race liable to suffer physical evils, and makes it vulnerable in this world...In his original, sinless and flawless state, mankind was bursting with health, so that viruses and other pathogens, which are all the more dangerous when an organism is weakened, caused him no harm whatsoever. He no doubt had intuitive wisdom and such finely tuned premonitory sense – far sharper than those of the most amazing of

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[106] Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 192. (The same point is made in Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, p. 58.)

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

[108] Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 244.

[109] Stump, "Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil", in Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, p. 328.

today's animals – that volcanic eruptions were incapable of causing him any danger.[110]

The idea that natural evils were of no consequence before the Fall was an idea that was popular in the theology of the early church.[111]

The Role of Satan (& His Cohorts)

Earlier on I looked at the way in which Chesterton defended human responsibility, rejecting any attempt to shift the blame on to others (in the form of either fate or other non-human beings). At the same time, Chesterton maintained a firm belief in the existence of the Devil, which he expressed through Father Brown. In *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, Father Brown tells us on two separate occasions: "I believe in the Devil."[112] Father Brown's belief in Satan is not merely allegorical. He is very aware of the reality of the Devil's supernatural working: "A miracle is startling; but it is simple…It is power coming directly from God (*or the Devil*) instead of indirectly through nature or human wills."[113] [italics mine]

If, in spite of the existence of the Devil, sin is man's responsibility, what is the role of the Devil? In answer to this question, Chesterton followed the thinking of Aquinas. Aquinas taught that the Devil persuades people to sin: "But God is not the cause of sin…It remains then that nothing else is directly the cause of human sin but the will. Therefore it is evident that the devil is not properly the cause of sin, but only in the manner of one persuading."[114] He does not force man to sin, primarily because he cannot force man to sin – God's gift of free will is absolute. Thus, although the Devil has a role in the process of sin, he is not a necessary part of that process. The way in

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[110] Henri Blocher, *Evil and the Cross* (1990; trans. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p. 58.

[111] This point is made by Charles Journet, *The Meaning Of Evil*, (1961; trans. Michael Barry London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), p. 218.

[112] Chesterton, "The Dagger with Wings" & "The Doom of the Darnaways", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 134. & p. 152.

[113] Chesterton, "The Wrong Shape", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 153.

[114] Aquinas, *On Evil*, p. 116.

which the Devil uses persuasion to entice people into sin is explored by Chesterton in his poem, "The Aristocrat". In this poem, the Devil is portrayed as a gentleman who offers good things, but does not ultimately, "keep his word".[115]

Although Chesterton agreed with Aquinas about the persuasive role of Satan, he disagreed about the Devil's level of involvement. Aquinas made the point that, "not all sins are committed at the instigation of the devil but some are due to the liberty of the will and the corruption of the flesh..."[116] This statement is in keeping with the somewhat passive role that Aquinas assigned to the Devil. Although Aquinas clearly believed in the Devil, he discussed him in rather an abstract sense, and never really seemed that comfortable with the influence of Satan in daily affairs. In contrast, Father Brown gravely makes the point that: "All evil has one origin..."[117] Inherent in this is Chesterton's belief that the Devil and his cohorts are very much involved in our daily lives. Although the responsibility for sin is finally ours, Satan is very active in his attempts to persuade us to sin. Chesterton recognised that this was a model that could be seen in the Garden of Eden when the serpent persuaded Eve to disobey God. However, as we saw in chapter five, although Chesterton ascribed an active role to Satan and his cohorts, he was wary of genres and techniques that bordered on theological dualism. The tension as to how much emphasis should be given to Satan and his cohorts, was one that Chesterton never fully resolved.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how Chesterton used the Free Will Defence to explain the origin of evil and defend the logical coherence of Christianity. The Free Will Defence, which has been the historic Christian position, was shown to be integral to Chesterton's own thought. His understanding of the Fall meant that he was convinced that the Free Will Defence was the orthodox Christian position. Chesterton believed that free will

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[115] G.K. Chesterton, "The Aristocrat", (1912; repr. *Collected Works Volume 10: Collected Poetry Part I*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 426.

[116] Aquinas, *On Evil*, p. 122.

[117] Chesterton, "The Dagger With Wings", *The Incredulity of Father Brown*, p. 130.

rather than determinism provided an adequate explanation of the moral evil we find around us. Although Chesterton did not address the issue himself, I also looked at the way in which some thinkers have extended the Free Will Defence to cover natural evil. This was done to demonstrate the ability of the Free Will Defence to provide a comprehensive answer to the origin of evil. Finally, I looked at Chesterton's understanding of the role of Satan within the context of the Free Will Defence.

Chesterton believed that the story of the Fall, which explains how we misused our free will, was ultimately good news. In his mind, free will was more than just a defence, it was an answer. Free will allowed us to believe that the universe was essentially good; the evil in it resulting from our misuse of free will. In his book on Aquinas he explained: "That 'God looked on all things and saw that they were good' contains a subtlety which the popular pessimist cannot follow; or is too hasty to notice. It is the thesis that there are no bad things; but only bad uses of things."[118]

Chesterton's commitment to the Free Will Defence, and his belief that it was ultimately good news, should not be misunderstood as shallow optimism. In the final chapter I will examine the true nature of Chesterton's optimism, showing that it was based on a real understanding of evil. However, in the meantime, it is important to recognise that although Chesterton used the Free Will Defence to explain the origin of evil, he knew it was only part of the story. The whole story, as summarised in the Apostles' Creed,[119] was necessary for a more comprehensive treatment of evil. Earlier on I examined Chesterton's play *The Surprise*, observing the way in which it defends God's decision to give man free will. During the second half of this play, the Author has to watch his creation misuse their freedom. This raises an important issue. Even if we can explain the origin of evil, there is also the question of why God apparently does not do anything about it. Chesterton ends his play by hinting at God's answer to that very question. As the puppets start trying to kill one another, the Author sticks his head through the scenery: "And in the devil's name, what do you think you are doing with my play?

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[118] Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 125.

[119] In *Orthodoxy* (p. 18), Chesterton declares that the core of Christian theology is summarised in the Apostles' Creed.

Drop it! Stop! I am coming down."[120] At the heart of the Christian story is the doctrine of the Incarnation; which explains that God, having seen how man was misusing his freedom, decided to come down and do something about it. As we read in the Gospel of John: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."[121]

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[120] Chesterton, *The Surprise*, p. 340.

[121] John 1: 14 (New International Version).

Chapter 8: Suffering and the Problem of Evil

In the previous chapter I looked at the Free Will Defence, explaining why it holds human beings responsible for bringing evil into the world. At the heart of this defence is the belief that the gift of free will merits the price that had to be paid for it. This was something that Chesterton firmly believed. He wrote: "I might cease to believe in a God of any kind; but I could not cease to think that a God who had made men and angels free was finer than one who coerced them into comfort."[1]

Suffering provides the Free Will Defence with its greatest challenge. Furthermore, the philosophical account of the origin of evil offered by the Free Will Defence can sometimes appear inadequate in the face of personal suffering. The value that Chesterton placed upon free will is not shared by everyone. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov challenges his younger brother to defend God's gift of free will in light of the countless examples of human suffering that have ensued:

> Tell me yourself directly, I challenge you – reply: imagine that you yourself are erecting the edifice of human fortune with the goal of, at the finale, making people happy, of at last giving them peace and quiet, but that in order to do it it would be necessary and unavoidable to torture to death only one tiny little creature, that same little child that beat its breast with its little fist, and on its unavenged tears to found that edifice, would you agree to be the architect on those conditions, tell me and tell me truly?"[2]

Ivan Karamazov thinks that the cost of freedom is too high: "It isn't God I don't accept, Aloysha, it's just his ticket that I most respectfully return to him."[3]

Suffering raises particularly acute questions for theism, which involve both the evidential problem of evil, and the existential problem of evil. The evidential argument from evil argues that: "Even if it is *possible* that God has a morally sufficient reason for

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[1] G.K. Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (1926; repr. London: Burns & Oates, 1951), p. 86.

[2] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880; trans. David McDuff, London: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 282.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 282.

creating the sort of world we experience…the facts of evil constitute *evidence* against the hypothesis that the world was created, and is governed, by an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God."[4] The existential problem of evil follows on from this. Michael Peterson explains: "For present purposes, the existential problem involves how the experience of evil conditions one's attitude toward God and perhaps toward the world. This problem cannot simply be reduced to an emotional or psychological one or divorced from the structure of one's belief and values. Rather it arises when the experience of evil creates a crisis for religious faith."[5]

Chesterton was well aware of the problem that suffering posed. In "The Sins of Prince Saradine", Father Brown admits that this world is not as fair as it should be: "I mean that we are here on the wrong side of the tapestry. The things that happen here do not seem to mean anything; they mean something somewhere else. Somewhere else retribution will come on the real offender. Here it often seems to fall on the wrong person."[6]

Some of Chesterton's contemporaries accused him of ignoring grief and suffering in his fiction. One suggested that, "he seems almost completely ignorant of the existence of sorrow or suffering."[7] In response to this accusation, one could cite the example of Flambeau grieving over the death of Pauline Stacey in "The Eye of Apollo".[8] Admittedly, there are relatively few examples of this type in Chesterton's fiction, but surely this can be attributed to a general failure on his part to develop his characters rather than suggesting that he deliberately ignored the reality of suffering in the world. On a personal level, Chesterton was familiar with the suffering of bereavement. His

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[4] "Introduction" to Marilyn McCord Adams & Robert Merrihew Adams, ed., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 16. There are many different forms of the evidential argument from evil. A number of these (along with rebuttals) can be found in Daniel Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

[5] "Introduction" to Michael L. Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), p. 7.

[6] G.K. Chesterton, "The Sins of Prince Saradine", *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911; repr. *The Annotated Innocence of Father Brown*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 169. This is a rare example of eschatology within Chesterton's fiction. Elsewhere, it is conspicuously absent; probably owing to his fascination with this world, and his desire to remind others of the wonder of creation.

[7] Henry Murray, "Gilbert Keith Chesterton", *The Bookman*, May 1910, p. 64.

[8] Chesterton, "The Eye of Apollo", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 205.

elder sister, Beatrice, died when he was only three years old. Later on in life, at the end of the First World War, Chesterton also lost his brother, Cecil Chesterton. Discussing this second bereavement, Joseph Pearce notes that: "Gilbert was utterly devastated by the news of his brother's death and completely unconsolable."[9]

This chapter will look at Chesterton response to human suffering and the questions that it raises. In doing so, I will address aspects of the problem of evil that were ignored in the previous chapter. I will begin by asking whether or not theism should try to explain every instance of suffering. Having considered this, I will go on to think about sin, a subject that was central to Chesterton's understanding of evil. Two questions arise in regard to this: 'How much does it explain?' and, 'What solution does God provide to it?' After discussing these two questions, I will be in a position to analyse the Free Will Defence in greater detail. Even then, a number of questions remain unanswered. With this in mind, the rest of the chapter is devoted to the *Book of Job* and the place of mystery in Chesterton's theodicy. I will conclude by suggesting that Chesterton's ultimate response to the problem of evil involved integrating the Free Will Defence with the lessons that he discovered in the *Book of Job*.

Does All Suffering Require An Explanation? – Implications Of The Free Will Defence

In an essay entitled, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God", Peter Van Inwagen makes the following suggestion: "I want to suggest that much of what goes on in the world, even much of what seems important and significant to us, is no part of God's plan – and certainly not a part of anyone *else's* plan – and is therefore due simply to chance."[10] It is important that we understand Inwagen's argument correctly. He is not suggesting that evil *per se* is without explanation: "I want to deny only that

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[9] Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), p. 239.

[10] Peter Van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God", in Thomas Morris, ed., *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 221.

there is any reason to suppose that, for every individual misfortune, God has a reason for not preventing *that* misfortune."[11] Nor is he proposing a form of deism, in which God is no longer involved in the world. His thesis is simply that God sustains the world by sustaining causal laws of nature, and that the operation of these laws, has certain accidental by-products, which can be referred to as chance events.

An important question in this discussion is the meaning of the word 'chance'. Inwagen elaborates: "What I shall mean by saying that an event is a 'chance' occurrence...is this: The event or state of affairs is without purpose or significance; it is not a part of anyone's plan; it serves no one's end; and it might very well not have been."[12] An alternative to this definition can be found in the writings of Boethius: "Whenever something is done for some purpose, and for certain reasons something other than what was intended happens, it is called chance...We may therefore define chance as an unexpected event due to the conjunction of its causes with action which is done for some purpose."[13] The interesting thing about both definitions is that chance maintains its compatibility with the belief that God is the designer of the Universe. Chance is seen as a by-product of God's design. This understanding concurs with the argument presented in the previous chapter: in designing the world, God did not dictate everything that would occur in it. The greatest variable in His design was free will. Chesterton describes this state of affairs as, "an idea of free will operating under conditions of design".[14]

This emphasis on chance appears, at first, to challenge the Christian doctrine of Providence.[15] It certainly rejects the Calvinistic view of providence as a state of affairs in which everything that occurs in the world, is directly determined by God. However,

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[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 232-3.

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 220.

[13] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Trans. V.E. Watts, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 148. Boethius' subtle discussion of the interplay between free will and providence can be found in book five of *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

[14] G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925; repr. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 246.

[15] For a more detailed look at various perspectives on the role and meaning of providence, see William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988). In this book, Craig examines the thought of: Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, Molina, and Suarez.

it does not necessarily contradict the Thomistic view of providence. Aquinas believed in God's providence, and argued that, "all things are subject to divine providence".[16] At the same time, Brian Davies points out that: "He does not think that every natural process must be the inevitable outcome of causes operating in a deterministic way. For one thing, he believes in the reality of human freedom..."[17]

Aquinas argued that human beings only had free will because God had determined that they should. Thus he saw no contradiction between his belief in providence and free will: "For him, God does not interfere with created free agents to push them into action in a way that infringes their freedom...He makes them to be what they are, namely freely acting agents."[18] As Aquinas explained: "God, therefore, is the first cause, Who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their acts being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary: but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them..."[19] Chesterton made the same point more succinctly: "Man was free, not because there was no God, but because it needed a God to set him free."[20]

Without compromising the biblical concept of providence, chance can be seen as an inherent part of the Free Will Defence. Thus the theist does not need to try and account for every occurrence of suffering.[21] Chesterton believed chance to be a good thing, because it turned life into an exciting adventure story: "But the point is that a story is exciting because it has in it so strong an element of will, of what theology calls free-

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[16] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 22, Article 2 (Vol. 1, Trans. English Dominican Fathers, London: Burns & Oates, 1947), p. 122.

[17] Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 161.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

[19] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 83, Article 1, Reply Objection 3, p. 418.

[20] G.K. Chesterton, "The Chartered Libertine", *A Miscellany of Men* (1912; repr. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1926), p. 251.

[21] An important distinction needs to be made here between the cause of an event and the event itself. I have argued that the cause of an event does not always have a meaning. Therefore we should not always seek to explain why God caused an instance of suffering to occur. However, this does not stop God bringing some meaning out of the event. Aquinas thought that God must have a reason for not always intervening to stop suffering. (The reason behind God's decision not to always intervene is carefully explored by Eleonore Stump in her essay, "Aquinas and the Sufferings of Job" in Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil.*)

will. You cannot finish a sum how you like. But you can finish a story how you like."[22] Throughout his life, Chesterton cultivated this spirit of adventure. In his *Autobiography*, he describes how he made the decision to move to Beaconsfield. Both he and Frances went out one day, "upon a journey into the void, a voyage deliberately objectless."[23] When they arrived at a nearby train station, Chesterton asked to go wherever the next train went. Upon reaching Slough they went for a walk, ended up in Beaconsfield, and made the decision to move there. Chesterton thought that the sense of adventure he found in Christianity set it apart from more deterministic beliefs. In his discussion of other philosophies and religions in *The Everlasting Man*, Chesterton declared: "There is none of them that really grasps this human notion of the tale, the test, the adventure; the ordeal of the free man. Each of them starves the story-telling instinct, so to speak, and does something to spoil human life considered as a romance..."[24] Commenting on the necessity of freedom for any adventure story, William Isley writes: "The human life is a dramatic adventure story, and an adventure story or a romance is not determined."[25]

The human adventure story does not take place in an individual, autonomous realm. This is because it is effected by the consequences of the free activity of other moral agents. While some instances of suffering have no explanation, others can be explained in terms of the activity of other free moral agents. Aquinas drew a distinction between evil suffered (*malum poenae*) and evil done (*malum culpae*). Evil suffered can often be explained as a chance occurrence without any direct cause, but evil done (or sin), is far more deliberate, and explains a great deal of the evil that we find in the world.

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[22] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (1908; repr. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1927), p. 252.

[23] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 220.

[24] Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 246.

[25] William L. Isley, Jr, *The Adventure of Life: Romance in the Writing of G.K. Chesterton* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Drew University, 1986), p. 195. Isley devotes a section of his thesis to the link between human freedom and adventure (pp. 191-6) Further discussion of this theme can be found in "Chapter 6: Chesterton and Adventure" of John Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984).

Sin – An Explanation[26]

In the previous chapter I looked at the way in which Chesterton saw the Fall of man as the best explanation of our sinful nature. Along with Aquinas, Chesterton believed that sin provided the focal point for any discussion of evil. On one occasion he wrote a letter to *The Times* in response to a challenge it had given to its readers to write in and explain what was wrong with the world. His reply was simply: "Dear Sir, *I am*. Yours faithfully" [Italics mine]. There are a number of reasons behind this emphasis on sin which are worth highlighting.

Chesterton recognised that it made sense to begin with what we know. Amid the many mysteries that surround the problem of evil, sin offers a concrete explanation that is easily identified. When Wilfred Bohun discovers that his brother has been murdered in "The Hammer of God", he declares: "My brother is dead. What does it mean? What is this horrible mystery?"[27] In response, the cobbler replies: "Plenty of horror sir, but not much mystery."[28] Wilfred Bohun's appeal to mystery is particularly ironic in light of the fact that he has committed the crime himself. Chesterton uses this incident to remind us that people sometimes seek a mysterious solution to evil in order to mask their own responsibility for it. The idea that free moral agents have introduced evil into the world is central to the Free Will Defence.

Another reason behind Chesterton's emphasis on sin was that he perceived it to be a large causal factor. For every example of unexplained evil, there are a multitude of examples that can be explained by sin. This has prompted Charles Journet to make the following suggestion: "The sea of suffering which breaks upon humanity is not simply the result of what we have inherited from Adam, but incomparably more is it the result of man's own wilful actions, his pride, his ambitions, his jealousies, his hatreds, his

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[26] This section will explore further Chesterton's awareness of the brokeness of creation, a theme that we began to look at in the previous chapter. The way in which this relates to Chesterton's emphasis on the doctrine of creation is looked at in the next chapter.

[27] Chesterton, "The Hammer of God", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 184.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

cruelties, and his follies."[29] In an increasingly secular world, the Christian concept of sin seems to have little purchase on the minds of the population. And yet, it is probably the single greatest contribution that Christianity has to offer to the problem of evil: "[Christianity] teaches that the place to begin in grappling with the problem of evil is not the *evils without* but the *evils within*, not the evils that just happen or that are charged to others but one's own contribution to the problem."[30] It is interesting that in recent years, the problem of evil has tended to emphasise moral evil (which can be explained by sin) rather than natural evil. Stephen Davis explains:

> One interesting fact to emerge from recent discussions of the problem of evil is that the paradigm evil event to which virtually all theodicists now refer...is the Holocaust, i.e., the murder of six million Jews and others by the Nazis during World War II. At one time the paradigm evil event referred to by theodicists was the infamous Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755. Followed by fires and even a flood of the Tagus, the disaster destroyed the city and killed tens of thousands of people. The Lisbon earthquake is an example of natural evil; the Holocaust, of moral evil. Although both are apt symbols of human suffering, it is perhaps fitting that the one has replaced the other in our minds as *the* evil event.[31]

A further reason for Chesterton's particular emphasis was his understanding of the corrosive nature of sin. Father Brown is quick to point out its destructive nature to Flambeau: "Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. That road goes down and down. The kind man drinks and turns cruel; the frank man kills and lies about it. Many a man I've known started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime."[32] Part of the reason that sin is so destructive was highlighted in chapter three when we looked at its parasitic nature. According to Aquinas, another reason is that bad acts have no redeeming qualities. "With 'evil suffered' there is always an explanation in terms of goodness and (ultimately) in terms of God as the Maker of good things. But

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[29] Charles Journet, *The Meaning of Evil* (1961; trans. Michael Barry, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963), p. 222.

[30] Marilyn M. Adams, "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil", in Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, p. 173.

[31] "Introduction" to Stephen Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd, 1981), p. 6.

[32] Chesterton, "The Flying Stars", *The Innocence of Father Brown*, p. 99.

with 'evil done', says Aquinas, there is no similar explanation...The evil involved here has no concomitant good."[33]

If you believe, as Chesterton did, that sin is the worst of all evils, then finding a solution to it becomes one of life's primary goals. This is why the concept of sin and man's need for forgiveness is so important to the Christian faith. Chesterton claimed that it was the reason behind his eventual conversion into the Roman Catholic Church in 1922. In his *Autobiography*, he informs us that he joined the Roman Catholic Church: "To get rid of my sins."[34] He continues: "For there is no other religious system that does *really* profess to get rid of people's sins. It is confirmed by the logic, which to many seems startling, by which the Church deduces that sin confessed and adequately repented is actually abolished; and that the sinner does really begin again as if he had never sinned."[35]

The final reason behind Chesterton's focus on sin was that he believed it to be a tremendous abuse of a tremendous privilege. The Free Will Defence is based on the belief that the gift of free will was the most valuable thing that God could have given to humanity. Hence the Free Will Defence's belief that God is justified in allowing the possibility of evil in the world. As a result, sin, which is a misuse of this gift, is declared to be a terrible thing. Chesterton recognised this when he wrote: "In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am *a* man I am the chief of sinners."[36] Chesterton elaborated on this elsewhere: "For sin, whatever else it is, is not *merely* the dregs of a bestial existence. It is something more subtle and spiritual, and is in some way connected with the very supremacy of the human spirit."[37]

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[33] Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, p. 95.

[34] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 340.

[35] *Ibid.*, pp. 340-1.

[36] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 171.

[37] G.K. Chesterton, *Come to Think of It...* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1930), p. 156.

Although sin accounts for a considerable amount of suffering by holding humanity responsible, the Free Will Defence still has a case to answer. If God is good, and able to do anything that is logically possible, then surely God has a responsibility to intervene. In response, it might be argued that the effects of sin (i.e. suffering) are deserved, and therefore, that a just God is under no obligation to intervene. While this argument has some merit, it appears to be counter-intuitive. Any loving parent would surely do anything possible to help alleviate their child's suffering. With this in mind, David Griffin attacks the Free Will Defender: "According to their position, since God freely created human freedom, God could interrupt it at any time. Hence they must explain why God does not interrupt it to prevent at least some of the more horrendous moral evils that occur."[38]

It was because he agreed that God should do something, that Chesterton placed the Free Will Defence within the broader Christian framework of the Apostles' Creed.[39] At the heart of the Christian message is the news that God has done something about sin and its consequences. This was most graphically described by Chesterton in his play, *The Surprise*, which I looked at in the conclusion to the previous chapter. The play ends with the puppet master choosing to get involved in the lives of the creatures that he has created. Hugh Kenner reminds us of the importance of the Incarnation in Chesterton's writing: "Indeed, the Incarnation can be said to bring every strand of Chesterton's perception to a focus."[40]

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[38] David Griffin in Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, p. 180.

[39] "These essays are concerned only to discuss the actual fact that the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles' Creed) is the best root of energy and sound ethics." Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 18.

[40] Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948), p. 91. Kenner goes on to tell us that *The Everlasting Man* is, "the most valuable single record of the place of the Incarnation in his [Chesterton's] thinking." (p. 143.)

Although the Incarnation describes God's intervention in the world, it does not solve the problem of sin by itself.[41] The solution is found in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through the Atonement, God deals with the sin of humanity. Thomas Hart has suggested that Chesterton's treatment of this subject is inadequate: "What is weak in Chesterton's treatment of Christ is his handling of the centrally kerygmatic events of Christ's death and resurrection. We saw a hint, in connection with the *Book of Job*, of the value Chesterton finds in Christ's suffering and death, but in general he does not have too much to offer on the score of soteriology."[42] It seems to me that Hart's criticism of Chesterton on this point is fair, although it does require some qualification. The centrality of the cross in Chesterton's thinking is visible in his preface to a book by A.H. Baverstock entitled, *The Unscathed Crucifix*: "In the following suggestive and far-reaching reflections, Mr Baverstock has made it [the cross] the key to all kinds of suffering in a time when we all suffer…He and we, after all the centuries, set up again this ancient ensign of wood against the ensigns of the new evils…"[43] Elsewhere, Chesterton's most sustained discussion of the cross can be found in *The Everlasting Man*, in a chapter entitled "The Strangest Story in the World". Yet even here, Chesterton did not elaborate in regard to his soteriology. Although Chesterton acknowledged the importance of the Cross, he never managed to explain how or why it was important. This is especially surprising in view of his prolific writings on virtually everything else. One possible explanation for this is the suggestion that Chesterton spent his life shaking off the beliefs of his Unitarian upbringing.[44] In *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, he stated that, "it was from a position originally much more detached and indefinite that I had been converted, an atmosphere if not agnostic at least pantheistic or unitarian."[45] If this was the case, it would explain Hugh Kenner's observation that: "The Crucifixion fascinated him more and more as he grew older…"[46]

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[41] At the same time, within the field of Christology, it is virtually impossible to maintain a strict distinction between the person of Christ and the work of Christ. The doctrine of the Incarnation involves aspects of soteriology.

[42] Thomas N. Hart, *G.K. Chesterton's Case for Christianity* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Graduate Theological Union, 1974), p. 215.

[43] G.K. Chesterton "Preface" to A.H. Baverstock, *The Unscathed Crucifix* (London: The Faith Press, 1916), p. 10.

[44] Chesterton's parents were Unitarians.

[45] Chesterton, *The Catholic Church and Conversion*, p. 19.

[46] Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton*, p. 100.

Alternatively, we might simply explain the lack of detail by remembering that he was a highly symbolic thinker and writer who was quite prone to ignoring such details.[47]

If Chesterton was unsure of exactly how God had dealt with the problem of man's sin, he was at least clear as to the result: Humanity could be forgiven, As one of the Biblical writers declares: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."[48] Chesterton believed that some of the continuing evils in the world were the result of our failure to grasp hold of the opportunity of repentance. He declared: "We have lost the idea of repentance; especially in public things; that is why we cannot get rid of our great national abuses…"[49] His Roman Catholic faith led him to believe that the church had a vital role to play in pardoning men's sins. This is illustrated throughout the Father Brown stories. Father Brown is more interested in hearing confessions than he is in acquiring convictions. When challenged about this in "The Chief Mourner of Marne", Father Brown responds passionately: "Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon."[50] As this quotation indicates, Chesterton thought that God's solution to sin was sufficient enough to cover every type of sin. All that was left, was for individuals to confess.

Sin & The Free Will Defence – Further Reflections

By placing the Free Will Defence within its Christian framework, we have seen how it answers additional questions concerning suffering. Sin is the primary cause of most

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[47] Chesterton's symbolism is discussed further in chapter two. It is interesting to note that his symbolism stands in contradistinction to the Unitarians, who were not at all symbolic.

[48] 1 John 1: 9 (New International Version).

[49] Chesterton, "The Mediaeval Villain", *A Miscellany of Men*, p. 234.

[50] G.K. Chesterton, "The Chief Mourner of Marne" in *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 168-9.

human suffering, which makes mankind responsible for much of its own suffering. Nevertheless, Christianity argues that God, because of His love for mankind, has acted in history to solve the human predicament of sin. However, this still does not fully explain the problem of suffering. Christ's atonement may provide a long term solution to suffering by overcoming sin, but what about the countless instances of suffering that continue to occur. The obvious answer to this is to argue that if God continually intervened, then our free will would no longer be meaningful. While this is true, both Scripture and Church history suggest that God has intervened on certain occasions to alleviate suffering. Thus we cannot escape the problem of why God has chosen to act in the way that He does. For example, why did He heal some of the sick people in the New Testament, while apparently refusing to intervene during the Holocaust? (As I have already suggested, the Holocaust raises some particularly difficult questions for any theodicy or theological system. Hence John Roth's comment that: "Common Christian assumptions about God, Jesus, and the future are tested by the Holocaust at every turn..."[51]) The problem for Christianity is articulated by Oliver Leaman:

> Now, we know that many terrible events do take place in the world, terrible events which God could prevent, or at least limit, were he to think it desirable. If our notion of God is of a being who remains interested in the world but is determined not to intervene, not to prevent things happening which cause immense suffering, then we are left with a rather unattractive concept of the deity.[52]

Aquinas acknowledged this problem in his *Summa Theologica* in his discussion of providence. As he saw it, the objection was as follows: "Further, a wise provider excludes any defect or evil, as far as he can, from those over whom he has a care. But we see many evils existing. Either, then, God cannot hinder these, and thus is not

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[51] John K. Roth, *A Consuming Fire: Encounters with Elie Wiesel and the Holocaust* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 11. In a similar vein is Graham Walkers's observation that: "Elie Wiesel claims that the Holocaust is an event with divine ramifications that shatters current theological images of God.", Graham B. Walker, Jr., *Elie Wiesel: A Challenge to Theology* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company Inc, 1988), p. 1. Elie Wiesel is a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust who has written a number of books exploring the meaning of the Holocaust. The most famous of these, and perhaps the most disturbing, is his novel, *Night* (1958).

[52] Oliver Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 195.

omnipotent; or else He does not have care for anything."[53] In response, Aquinas argued that: "Since God, then, provides universally for all beings, it belongs to His providence to permit certain defects in particular effects, that the perfect good of the universe may not be hindered..."[54] According to Aquinas, God's limited intervention in history has been in the best interests of the whole universe rather than particular situations. This argument is difficult to assess. It is logically possible that this is the case, and, since no human has the knowledge necessary to know what actions will work out for the universal good of the creation, we cannot demand that God should have acted otherwise. At the same time, his response appears insensitive to the numerous examples of horrendous suffering that have occurred throughout history. In terms of the Holocaust, was there really no alternative?

Upon investigation, it seems that the Free Will Defence raises almost as many questions as it answers. Furthermore, some of the answers that it gives are speculative, and others, though logically possible, seem harsh. This must eventually lead us to question exactly how successful the Free Will Defence is as a theodicy. By way of a prolegomenon to this question, we must first decide what is expected from a theodicy.

Historically, the expectations placed on theodicy appear to have altered. Neither Augustine or Aquinas were trying to defend the existence of God when they devised their theodicies. They were simply trying to explain why God created and sustained the world in the way that He did. The change in emphasis began to occur with Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716). By the time that David Hume (1711-1776) had finished his critique of theism, the main task of the theodicist was to defend the existence of God in the face of evil. In more recent years, the role of theodicy has again been questioned. Some argue that theodicy should try to *explain* the compossibility of evil and theism,[55] while some suggest that it need only show that such a compossibility

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[53] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part I, Question 22, Article 2, Objection 2, p. 122.

[54] *Ibid.*, Part I, Question 22, Article 2, Reply Objection 2, p. 123.

[55] Among others, this position was adopted by both Augustine and Aquinas.

is logically possible.[56] Others have gone as far as suggesting that these sorts of philosophical discussions are an inappropriate response to human suffering.[57]

Michael Peterson tells us that the difference between defence and theodicy is one of the main areas of debate in contemporary discussion on the problem of evil.[58] The discussion centres around whether theism is able to explain why evil occurs, or whether it must resign itself to explaining why it might occur:

> In practice, of course, the probability of a defence will never be high on theism: if the defenders of theism knew of a story which accounted for the sufferings of the actual world and which was highly probable on theism, he would employ it as a theodicy. We may therefore say that, in practice, a defence is a story which accounts for the sufferings of the actual world and which (given the existence of God) is 'true for all anyone knows'.[59]

Whether or not the Free Will Defence should be classified as a theodicy or a defence is the subject of much debate. In essence, it is surely a theodicy, as the explanation it offers – that moral agents freely introduced evil into the world – is 'highly probable on theism'. Elsewhere though, it can offer no more than a defence of theism. This can be seen in the possible extensions of the Free Will Defence to cover natural evil (which I explored in the last chapter); and with Aquinas' non-verifiable belief that God is justified in not intervening to prevent each particular instance of suffering because He has to think about the good of the whole universe.

The inability of either sin or the Free Will Defence to explain evil in its entirety does not necessarily constitute a problem for theism. Indeed, the *Book of Job* would appear to suggest that some element of mystery is actually quite desirable.

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[56] In contemporary philosophy of religion, the most obvious example is Alvin Plantinga. He is keen to point out that he is arguing for a defence rather than a theodicy.

[57] An example of this can be found in Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991). In the introduction, he writes: "As the predominant modern theological and philosophical discourse practice about God and evil, theodicy misportrays and effaces genuine evils." (p. 1.)

[58] See Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, pp. 14-7.

[59] Peter Van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, of Air, and of Silence", in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 74.

The *Book Of Job* & The Place Of Mystery

The outline of the *Book of Job* is relatively simple. Job is a good, devout, successful man, who becomes the subject of a wager between Satan and God. Would Job still worship God if he suffered more? As a result, Job begins to endure terrible sufferings. He loses his wealth and his family. Later on he is afflicted with painful sores all over his body. Unable to explain the cause of his suffering, Job consults with his friends, who tell him that in some way, he must be personally responsible for his suffering. Eventually Job challenges God to explain His actions, and in response, God reminds him that there is a great deal that Job does not know about the universe. Job accepts this charge, and the story concludes with Job worshipping God, and God blessing Job. The significance of the story lies in the question it raises: "In a manner of speaking, this book is a philosophical forum put in the format of an old folk tale. It addresses the most perplexing of human problems: Why do the innocent suffer?"[60] Indeed, the *Book of Job* has subsequently become a classic statement of the problem of evil: "For Western man Job has been the pre-eminent symbol of innocent suffering."[61] Eugene Goodheart reminds us of the literary legacy that the *Book of Job* has left behind. He writes: "Behind much of the modern literature of suffering is the greatest single work of the Bible, *The Book of Job*. We hear echoes of *Job* in books as different from one another as *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Castle*."[62]

Chesterton was heavily influenced by the *Book of Job*. According to one recent critic, the struggles that he experienced during the 1890's, "left him engrossed with the problem of evil, and with that book of the Old Testament which treats it most explicitly." He continues: "References to the *Book of Job* crop up in all sorts of apparently unlikely places..."[63] Christopher Hollis makes a similar comment in his book on Chesterton: "Of the books of the Old Testament that which was the main

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[60] Michael Peterson, in Peterson, ed., *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, p. 23.

[61] "Introduction" to Paul S. Sanders, ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Book of Job* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1968), p. 1.

[62] Eugene Goodheart, "Job and the Modern World", in Sanders, ed., *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of the Book of Job*, p. 98.

[63] "Introduction" to Russell Sparkes, ed., *Prophet of Orthodoxy: The Wisdom of G.K. Chesterton* (London: Harper Collins, 1997), p. 63.

influence on him was the book of Job, for it was there that he found this problem of evil more frankly confronted than anywhere else in literature."[64] Chesterton was aware that virtually everyone questions suffering at some point in their life. The relevance of Job to these questions was one of the things that drew him to the story: "The world is still asking the questions that were asked by Job."[65] Chesterton believed that the way in which the *Book of Job* treated suffering made it more valuable than many other philosophical works on the subject. He wrote: "The *Book of Job* is better worth hearing than any modern philosophical conversation in the whole modern philosophical world."[66]

God's answer to Job leaves a number of Job's questions unanswered. Chesterton thought that this was central to understanding the tale: "The *Book of Job* stands definitely alone because the *Book of Job* definitely asks, 'But what is the purpose of God?' Is it worth the sacrifice, even of our miserable humanity?...It is because of this question that we have to attack as a philosophical riddle the riddle of the *Book of Job*."[67] Mystery is at the heart of the *Book of Job*, as Peter Kreeft reminds us: "If Job is about the problem of evil, then Job's answer to that problem is that we do not know the answer."[68]

The mistake that is often made when interpreting the *Book of Job* is trying to explain away everything that occurs to Job. This is exactly what Job's friends, or comforters attempt: "They will keep on saying that everything in the universe fits into everything else: as if there were anything comforting about a number of nasty things all fitting into

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[64] Christopher Hollis, *The Mind of Chesterton* (London: Hollis & Carter Ltd, 1970), p. 42. Chesterton's fixation with the *Book of Job* is confirmed by Dudley Barker's observation that: "His love-letters are spattered with quotations from the *Book of Job*." See Dudley Barker, *G.K. Chesterton: A Biography* (London: Constable & Company, 1973), p. 98. Chesterton's interest in the *Book of Job* goes back a long way. One of his *Notebooks*, dated around 1892, lists the *Book of Job* as his favourite poem. (See *Notebook* 73321B, 1892, p. 27., "The Department of Manuscripts", British Library, London.)

[65] G.K. Chesterton, *The Well and the Shallows* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1935), p. 66.

[66] G.K. Chesterton, "On Long Speeches and Truth", *The Illustrated London News* (1906; repr. *Collected Works Volume 27: The Illustrated London News 1905-1907*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 132.

[67] G.K. Chesterton, "The Book of Job" (1907; repr. in G.K. Chesterton, *Selected Essays*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1949), p. 96.

[68] Peter Kreeft, *Three Philosophies of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 61.

each other."[69] Later on in his introduction to the *Book of Job*, Chesterton expands upon his criticism of the answers given by Job friends. He explains:

> The mechanical optimist endeavours to justify the universe avowedly upon the ground that it is a rational and constructive pattern. He points out that the fine thing about the world is that it can all be explained. That is one point, if I may put it so, on which God, in return, is explicit to the point of violence. God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained...God will make Job see a startling universe if He can only do it by making Job see an idiotic universe.[70]

Brian Horne concurs with Chesterton's view that the meaning of Job defies explanation. He tells us that, "there is no 'solution', there is only submission to the inexplicable facts."[71]

Chesterton did not think that the mystery in the *Book of Job* should be regarded as a failure on the part of theism. Instead he viewed it as something positive. There were a number of reasons for this. To begin with, an element of mystery is central to a proper understanding of faith. Chesterton expanded on this early on in his writings:

> It is significant that in the greatest religious poem existent, the *Book of Job*, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. 'Hast Thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?' This simple sense of wonder...is the basis of spirituality...[72]

(Chesterton's comment here is an attack on rationalism rather than rational thought, a distinction that he made clear in *Orthodoxy* – "Chapter 2: The Maniac".)

According to Chesterton, the mystery of suffering also has a paradoxical ability to offer comfort to those who are suffering: "It is the lesson of the whole work that man is most

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[69] Chesterton, "The Book of Job", *Selected Essays*, p. 98.

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 101. For a more detailed examination of Chesterton's belief in the startling nature of the universe, see my discussion of the grotesque in chapter four.

[71] Brian Horne, *Imagining Evil*, (London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd, 1996), p. 21.

[72] G.K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (1901; repr. London. J. M. Dent & Co Ltd. 1918), pp. 69-70.

comforted by paradoxes...I need not suggest what a high and strange history awaited this paradox of the best man in the worst fortune. I need not say that in the freest and most philosophical sense there is one Old Testament figure who is truly a type: or say what is pre-figured in the wounds of Job."[73] Chesterton's argument here hints at a more mystical theodicy in which suffering is an honour that allows the protagonist to share in the sufferings of Christ and thereby experience something of the Divine. Chesterton only makes this suggestion tentatively, aware perhaps of the way in which it threatens to confuse our notion of what goodness actually entails. Nevertheless, we find the same idea repeated in a separate discussion of the *Book of Job*: "From it the modern Christian may with astonishment learn Christianity; learn, that is, that mystery of suffering may be a strange honour and not a vulgar punishment: that the King may be conferring a decoration when he pins the man on the cross as much as when pins the cross on the man."[74]

Another factor behind Chesterton's interest in the mystery of suffering was the hope that he found within it. He believed that an acceptance of life's mysteries released us from the pressure of having to answer all of life's difficulties. This was one reason that led him to embrace Christianity: "For mysticism, and mysticism alone, has kept men sane from the beginning of the world. All the straight roads of logic lead to some Bedlam, to Anarchism or to passive obedience, to treating the universe as a clockwork of matter or else as a delusion of the mind. It is only the Mystic, the man who accepts the contradictions, who can laugh and walk easily through the world."[75] Thus Chesterton confidently assures us that the mystery contained in the *Book of Job* can give hope to individuals struggling with suffering: "Indeed the *Book of Job* avowedly only answers mystery with mystery. Job is comforted with riddles; but he is comforted."[76]

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[73] Chesterton, "The Book of Job", *Selected Essays*, pp. 103-4.

[74] Chesterton, "On Long Speeches and Truth", *The Illustrated London News* (1906; repr. *Collected Works Volume 27: The Illustrated London News 1905-1907*), p. 132.

[75] G.K. Chesterton, "Why I Believe in Christianity" (Repr. *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 10 No. 4, November 1984), p. 372.

[76] Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, p. 98.

Although God's answer to Job is mysterious, the fact that he answers at all suggests that there is an answer to the problem of suffering, even if Job does not know what it is: "For when he who doubts can only say 'I do not understand', it is true that he who knows can only reply or repeat 'You do not understand'. And under that rebuke there is always a sudden hope in the heart; and the sense of something that would be worth understanding."[77] God's response to Job is not that an answer does not exist, but that Job is not able to understand it. The recognition of God as an omnipotent, omniscient being, allowed Chesterton to trust Him for the things that he did not understand. Chesterton wrote: "I believe that mystical providences are philosophically possible: and have the less need to dogmatise either way about any detailed occasion. It is only the man who does not believe in miracles who need lash himself into an excitement when he hears of one."[78]

Integrating The *Book Of Job* With The Free Will Defence

The theists' appeal to mystery can easily be seen as an attempt to avoid the real problem of suffering. Chesterton's tentative suggestion that suffering is not as terrible as it seems (because it allows the individual to experience the Divine) is a prime example of this. By declaring suffering to be a mystery that is actually good (if properly understood), Chesterton threatens to treat it as an illusion. John Stuart Mill was particularly scathing of this approach: "I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow-creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him, to hell I will go."[79]

Throughout his writings, Chesterton was quick to avoid any attempt to explain everything in terms of mystery. This was clear in chapter five when I noted his desire to explain naturally anything that could be explained naturally. Although Chesterton

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[77] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[78] Chesterton, "Preface", to Baverstock, *The Unscathed Crucifix*, pp. 8-9. It is important that Chesterton's use of the word 'providence' is understood in a similar manner to Aquinas' conception of the doctrine. (See my earlier discussion in this chapter.)

[79] John Stuart Mill, "Mr Mansel on the Limits of Religious Thought" (1865; repr. in Nelson Pike, ed., *God and Evil: Readings on the Theological Problem of Evil*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1964), p. 43.

believed that mystery was an important and valid part of any theodicy, he recognised that it needed to accompany a more reasoned explanation. This was how he understood the *Book of Job*: "The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design."[80] Had the *Book of Job* wanted to suggest that the suffering of the innocent was a complete mystery, it would surely have left Job's questioning of God unanswered. The fact that God responds to Job is therefore significant: "The point of what God says, though, is not really much to do with what he says, but lies in his saying anything at all. God has made explicit his relationship with Job, and by implication with the rest of humanity as well..."[81]

Furthermore, the *Book of Job* defends the right of man to question God. God rebukes the assumptions implicit in Job's questions, rather than the questions themselves. As Chesterton argued: "He [God] is quite willing to be prosecuted. He only asks for the right which every prosecuted person possesses; He asks to be allowed to cross-examine the witness for the prosecution."[82] God does not attack the concept of theodicy *per se*, but rather the particular theodicy that Job and his friends present to Him.[83] Chesterton's recognition of this can be seen in his admiration of Shakespeare's tragedy, *King Lear*. Chesterton says of Lear: "...he affirms in the face of the most appalling self-knowledge, clear and blasting as the lightning, that his sufferings must still be greater than his sins. It is possibly the most tremendous thing a man ever said; whether or not any man had the right to say it. It would be hard to beat it even in the *Book of Job*."[84]

The way in which Chesterton combined the mystery of suffering with mankind's right to present a theodicy and question God, is visible in the concluding chapters of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Various critics have noted the correlation

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[80] Chesterton, "The Book of Job", *Selected Essays*, p. 100.

[81] Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 22.

[82] Chesterton, "The Book of Job", *Selected Essays*, p. 99.

[83] Gary Wills fails to grasp this distinction when he discusses the *Book of Job* in his introduction to an edition of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*: "The author of God's speeches in the *Book of Job* was the first person we know of to realize that the only theology worth having is the one that forswears theodicy." In Gary Wills, "Introduction", to G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1975), p. 12.

[84] G.K. Chesterton, "The Tragedy of King Lear", in *The Spice of Life and Other Essays* (Beaconsfield: Darwen Finlayson, 1964), p. 56.

between the final section of this novel and the *Book of Job*.[85] In his discussion of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, Ian Boyd suggests that: "It may be read in the light of the dedicatory poem as a kind of extended commentary on the *Book of Job*..."[86] Stephen Medcalf has also written on the link between the two works, suggesting that seven points made in Chesterton's introduction to the *Book of Job*, "seem to be systematically woven into the pattern of the last four chapters of *The Man who was Thursday*."[87] These are as follows: First, Job asks God what His purpose is, and the six detectives ask Sunday the same question. Second, both God and Sunday answer with riddles.[88] Third, both Job and Syme are comforted by the riddles they hear. Fourth, both God and Sunday point out the panorama of creation to their questioners. Fifth, Medcalf suggest that the secret of both stories is joy. Sixth, both stories suggest that the protagonists suffer because they are the best of men rather than the worst of men. Finally, both stories link the suffering of the protagonists to the suffering of Christ.

This final point that Medcalf identifies is particularly interesting in terms of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Although, Sunday does not represent the Christian God, he clearly symbolises something of the Divine in the novel. When Syme asks the question, 'have you ever suffered?', he receives the following response: "As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon,

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[85] Gary Wills goes even further than this in his introduction to the novel: "A recent biographer of Chesterton says there are 'direct references' to the *Book of Job* in the novel's last scene. Actually, the references are everywhere." In Wills, "Introduction", *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 9. Also see the comments by Denis Conlon on the link between the *Book of Job* and *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* in his introduction to G.K. Chesterton, *Collected Works Volume 6: The Man who was Thursday, The Club of Queer Trades, Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Ball and the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), pp. 40-5.

[86] Ian Boyd, *The Novels of G.K. Chesterton: A Study in Art and Propaganda* (London: Paul Elek Books Ltd, 1975), p. 51.

[87] Stephen Medcalf, "Introduction" to G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908; repr. Oxford: World's Classics, 1996), p. xxv. For an earlier comment by Medcalf on the link between the two books, see his essay, "The Achievement of G.K. Chesterton" in John Sullivan, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Centenary Appraisal* (London: Paul Elek Books, 1974), p. 105.

[88] In connection with this second point, Gary Wills speculates on the relationship between Sunday's escape on the elephant, and God's answer to Job: "Behemoth, in the Bible that Chesterton grew up with, was translated on the assumption that he was a hippopotamus. But in the Catholic bible which his brother and other friends were using by this time, the beast is something more fitted to the story at this point: an elephant. The effrontery of this last apparition is Chesterton's slyest way of establishing that Sunday is Job's riddling God." In Wills, "Introduction", *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 13. In view of Wills' suggestion, it is interesting to note that Aquinas identified the Behemoth as an elephant. See John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 523.

which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a common-place text that he had heard somewhere, 'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?'"[89] This allusion to the suffering of Christ,[90] seems to imply that Chesterton thought part of the solution to suffering might be found in the way that God identifies with our suffering.

This has once again become an area of major discussion in contemporary philosophical theology. In the aftermath of Jürgen Moltmann (1926-), theologians have asked two questions regarding the suffering of God. The first concerns God's ability to suffer: "The belief that God is a suffering God has become compelling for recent theology. Centuries of traditional belief about the impassability and the immutability of God have been overturned in our age, though a few pioneers signalled this revolution in our concept of God during the upheavals of nineteenth-century thought."[91] The second question follows on from the first – if God can share in our sufferings, does this provide an answer to the problem of evil? Paul Fiddes clearly thinks that it does, although a number of people would disagree with him on this matter. He declares: "Suffering will always have a dimension of mystery, as the *Book of Job* assures us, but a great deal of light is nevertheless cast by the affirmation that God suffers with humanity."[92]

While Chesterton's reference to the suffering of Christ in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* is interesting, I would suggest that it is a speculative thought rather than a serious statement of his theological position. If Chesterton had wanted to make serious theological statements on the nature of God in the novel, he would surely have made the character of Sunday less ambiguous. In addition, the subject of God's suffering is not something that he discusses to any significant degree elsewhere in his writings. Finally, it should also be remembered that Chesterton's affinity with Aquinas would

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[89] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 162.

[90] See Mark: 10: 38: "Jesus said. 'Can you drink the cup I drink...?'" (New International Version).

[91] Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 16.

[92] *Ibid.*, p. 31. Fiddes not only argues that the suffering of God is a comfort to those that are suffering, but also that it justifies His decision to give us the free will that brought evil into the world: "Only the fact that God himself suffers can make credible the tracing of suffering to the free will of the creation. This alone makes credible the creation of the world as an act of love." (pp. 34-5).

surely have made him reluctant to part company with Aquinas' teachings on the immutability and impassability of God.

The final chapter of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* finds Syme and his companions wrestling with the question of why they had to suffer. In view of the obvious autobiographical elements within the novel,[93] the answers that Syme discovers to this question can be seen to mirror those discovered by the young Chesterton. The answer to suffering that Chesterton discovers in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, provides us with a paradigm of how the Free Will Defence can be combined with the mystery that we find in the *Book of Job*. Part of the answer clearly confirms the Free Will Defence as a theodicy.[94] Syme discovers that this is a world where men act freely and live with the consequences of their actions. He even thanks Sunday for this freedom: "I am grateful to you…for many a fine scamper and free fight."[95] Syme also discovers that the good in the world outweighs the bad, and that the cost of man's freedom is worthwhile. This is the 'good news' with which he departs from the nightmare. At the close of the novel, we read that Syme was, "in possession of some impossible good news".[96] This theodicy provides him with the foundation required to trust God for that which he does not fully understand. As Chesterton said of Job: "Job does not in any sense look at life in a gloomy way…He wishes the universe to justify itself, not because he wishes it to be caught out, but because he really wishes it to be justified."[97]

Because Syme is confident that there is a sufficient reason to believe that the problem of evil has an explanation, he feels able to offer a speculative defence in response to other questions concerning evil. Hence his suggestion that humanity has to suffer so that it can, "buy the right to say to this accuser [Satan], 'We also have suffered'."[98] Similarly, although the Free Will Defence can only explain part of the problem of evil

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[93] This is made explicit by Chesterton's dedication to E.C. Bentley at the start of the novel. I have already discussed this point in some detail in chapter six.

[94] By this I mean an explanation of evil that is highly probable in terms of theism.

[95] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 160.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

[97] Chesterton, "The Book of Job", *Selected Essays*, p. 97.

[98] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 162.

with any degree of certainty in terms of theism; this provides it with the necessary foundation to offer more speculative solutions to other parts of the problem of evil As the Free Will Defence moves from theodicy to defence, it needs only to offer solutions that are 'true for all anyone knows'. In this way, it can be combined with the mystery that we find in the *Book of Job*.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have continued my examination of Chesterton and the Free Will Defence by looking at the problem of suffering. The Free Will Defence provides a successful theodicy in response to some of the questions that accompany suffering. In a world that operates according to numerous causal laws, it can be argued that some suffering is the result of chance. Furthermore, the presence of free moral agents in such a world, who freely choose to sin, explains a considerable amount of the suffering that occurs. This obviously raises the question of how God has acted in response to suffering. Christianity argues that Jesus Christ provides the ultimate answer to sin: however, despite Chesterton's firm commitment to this belief, we saw that he failed to explain it to any significant degree.

Although the Free Will Defence explains a great deal, it also leaves a great deal unexplained. The mystery that accompanies suffering is eloquently expressed in the *Book of Job*, a tale which Chesterton often commented upon. Yet Chesterton held both viewpoints: suggesting that the problem of evil could be answered, while also believing that suffering was a mystery. At first this appears to be a contradictory position. In reality, it is another of the paradoxes for which Chesterton is so well known.[99] The coherence of this position can be seen in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. In the face of unexplained suffering, the Free Will Defence turns from being a 'theodicy' into a 'defence'. It respects the mystery of suffering by recognising that we do not *know* all of the answers. At the same time, it is not just wishful thinking, because it

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[99] For an interesting discussion of Chesterton and paradox, see Hugh Kenner's study, *Paradox in Chesterton*.

maintains its intellectual coherence, and is based on the solid foundation provided by the initial theodicy.

Chesterton recognised that life could only be explained by taking this middle ground between reason and mystery. He declared: "The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite."[100] In terms of suffering, he adapted the Free Will Defence to provide an explanation that respected the numerous problems involved. In doing so, Chesterton heeds the warning given by his fictional character, Gabriel Gale: "Oh, I know that people have written all kinds of cant and false comfort about the cause of evil; and of why there is pain in the world. God forbid that we should add ourselves to such a chattering monkey-house of moralists."[101]

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[100] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 146.

[101] G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson, 1962), p. 91.

Chapter 9: In Conclusion

After establishing my methodological approach in chapter two, I went on to look at Chesterton's understanding of the nature of evil in chapter three. It was essential that our first question concerning evil related to its nature. Unfortunately, this is a point that seems to have been forgotten by many contemporary thinkers writing on the subject.[1] I began the chapter by looking at the connection between Aquinas and Chesterton, which provided a useful focus for the analysis of Chesterton's theology. Chesterton did not become a Thomist by reading Aquinas, or any of the other writers in that tradition. Instead, he discovered that the philosophical position he had come to as a young man had a strong affinity with Thomism, and it is this that led Chesterton to identify increasingly with Aquinas. Having established this connection, we saw how Chesterton followed Aquinas (and Augustine) in describing evil as a privation, or deficiency. This understanding of the nature of evil was illustrated in the Father Brown stories.

One of the traditional difficulties of the theory of privation is the problem of how one imagines or depicts the 'absence of a particular good'. In response to this difficulty, the next three chapters went on to consider Chesterton's use of the grotesque as a technique for representing evil in his fiction. The subject of the grotesque was introduced in chapter four. As the grotesque is notoriously difficult to define, the first part of the chapter was given over to looking at the theoretical work that exists on the subject, while the second part went on to look at the different ways in which Chesterton understood the grotesque. In response to other nineteenth-century thinkers who focussed on the 'beautiful', Chesterton focussed on the concept of the grotesque, and used it as a synonym for the 'ugly'. This raised some important theological concerns, which were explained by Chesterton's tendency to use words and ideas in their broadest possible sense. Chesterton also viewed the grotesque as a technique for reawakening wonder. Both uses of the term 'grotesque' constituted an attempt to assert the value of existence in an age (i.e. decadence) that had grown tired of it. The third

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[1] I am thinking here about a number of philosophers of religion, who discuss the problem of evil without first trying to define exactly what it is that they are talking about. See my discussion of this point in chapter three.

function of Chesterton's grotesque was to represent evil. This was further explored in the two chapters that followed.

Chapter five made a distinction between the traditional grotesque (involving an external embodiment of evil), and the modern grotesque (involving an internalised evil). Although such a distinction is not absolute, it remains a useful means of describing the transition that occurred during the nineteenth century in the way that evil was represented. By the early-twentieth century, the representation of evil had been largely internalised. Chesterton's reputation as a traditionalist would naturally lead us to expect him to use the traditional grotesque, despite the period in which he wrote. Yet although examples of the traditional grotesque can be found in his work, they are surprisingly rare. The rest of chapter five sought to explain this, with reference to Chesterton's belief in privation, and his desire to relate to the fears of his age. Chapter six subsequently examined the modern grotesque. Chesterton did not think that an internalised evil was any less real or terrifying than an external embodiment of evil. In explaining this, I took a closer look at the rise of Modernism and the encounter that Chesterton had with it during the 1890's. His vision of a terrifying nothingness is powerfully communicated in the novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, which became the focus of my discussion in this chapter.

Having acknowledged the reality of evil, Chesterton was left with the same predicament that has challenged thinkers across the ages: How and why does a loving God permit evil to exist in the world? This was the subject of chapters seven and eight. In chapter seven, I looked at the Free Will Defence as a possible response to the problem of evil. The concept of free will was an important one for Chesterton, as was the related doctrine of the Fall of man, which throws into high relief the theological problem of freedom. Chesterton's use of the Free Will Defence was most explicit in his play *The Surprise*. In this play, Chesterton defended God's decision to give mankind the freedom that brought evil into the world.

Although the Free Will Defence accounts for the origin of evil into the world, it does not explain why God allows it to remain. The conclusion of *The Surprise* begins to address this issue. Furthermore, it can be argued that God is unable to prevent every instance of evil without making our free will meaningless. However, this does not alter

the fact that God can presumably prevent some of the suffering that exists in the world without compromising our free will. The question of suffering was the focus of chapter eight. Chesterton's interest in this matter is reflected by his fascination with the *Book of Job*. It was suggested that while the Free Will Defence can be extended to deal with many of the questions surrounding suffering, an element of mystery remains. I concluded this chapter by suggesting that Chesterton's response to suffering combined both mystery and theodicy; and that this integrated approach can be seen in his novel, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*.

In his discussion of Chesterton's alleged optimism, Michael Mason writes: "His innocence was achieved not basically at the cost of experience but through it – as seems the case with not a few English artists. There was a real underside of darkness and violence to his work; and the horror of everything which he would have associated with the devil is, in his artistic vision, none the less sinister for being formulated in the bright colours and simple shapes of his 'peasant art'."[2] Many of Chesterton's critics and biographers have highlighted the effect of his own experiences upon his subsequent understanding of evil. Of particular importance is the crisis that he went through during the 1890's at the Slade School of Art: "His time there, the unhappiest and most troubled in his life, was of great significance in the development of his thought. A number of experiences, both intellectual and emotional convinced him of the reality of evil."[3]

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to explain how Chesterton's concept of evil complements his "cosmic optimism"[4] rather than contradicting it.[5] I will argue that supporting Chesterton's optimism, is a solid metaphysical foundation that takes full

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[2] Michael Mason, *The Centre of Hilarity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1959), p. 240.

[3] John Coates, *Chesterton and the Edwardian Cultural Crisis* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1984), pp. 5-6. Chesterton's period at The Slade is a subject that I have already discussed, both in the introduction and in my discussion of *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* in chapter six.

[4] Graham Greene, "G.K. Chesterton" in D.J. Conlon, ed., *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 60.

[5] The word 'optimism' can have a number of possible meanings. At times, Chesterton happily accepts the term as an accurate description of his particular style of writing. At other times, he attacks some of his contemporaries for their unthinking optimism. When I use the term in this chapter, I mean a view of life that sees a greater amount of good in the world than bad. As this chapter progresses, I will explain this further, and show why such an interpretation is appropriate in this context.

account of the reality of evil. This is in contrast to the more existential explanations offered by some Chesterton critics such as Maurice Evans. Evans writes: "This is the Chestertonian answer to the pessimists. If the world seems evil and we cannot understand it, we must yet cling to our faith and belief in common things."[6] As the rest of this chapter will go on to demonstrate, Evans misunderstands Chesterton on this point.

The Value Of Existence

When Chesterton emerged from his period of sceptical pessimism, he concluded that philosophy should begin by assuming the existence of an objective reality. Any attempt to *prove* the existence of a reality outside of our own thinking was doomed to end in scepticism and/or solipsism. Chesterton explained that this was the reason behind Aquinas' failure to begin his philosophy by considering this issue: "The answer is that Thomas Aquinas recognised instantly, what so many modern sceptics have begun to suspect rather laboriously, that a man must either answer that question in the affirmative, or else never answer any question; never ask any question; never even exist intellectually, to answer or to ask."[7] I looked at the affinity between Chesterton and Aquinas in chapter three. The primacy of existence (or being) is one area in which the two thinkers share a great deal in common. Chesterton recognised the similarity in his *Autobiography*: "But I was all groping and groaning and travailing with an inchoate and half baked philosophy of my own…in the form that where there is anything there is God…but I should have been amazed to know how near in some ways was my Anything to the *Ens* of St Thomas Aquinas."[8]

Aquinas thought that existence was something that people intuitively recognised: "According to Jacques Maritain and Hans Urs von Balthasar, two leading interpreters of St Thomas in the twentieth century, we know being from the most basic human

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[6] Maurice Evans, *G.K. Chesterton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), pp. 84-5.

[7] G.K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933; repr. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), p. 176.

[8] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 151. The word 'Ens' is normally translated as 'being'.

experience...This is a fundamental human intuition (immediate knowledge. which no one can prove for us because we know it for ourselves)..."[9] Another description of this fundamental human intuition is what Chesterton liked to call common sense: "To this question 'Is there anything?' St Thomas begins by answering 'Yes': if he began by answering 'No', it would not be the beginning, but the end. That is what some of us call common sense."[10]

In his book on Aquinas, Francis Klauder tells us: "Included in the understanding of being as existing there is the realization that 'to be' is good: it is good (desirable) to be."[11] Chesterton had a similar understanding of existence. He came to accept the essential goodness of existence by recognising that he could not live with an alternative conclusion. This can be seen in *Manalive*, a book which "illustrates the raucous love of life which defines the creed of G.K. Chesterton".[12] During the trial of Innocent Smith, the court recalls his encounter with pessimism while at Brakespeare College, Cambridge. When Innocent Smith challenges his own pessimism and that of Dr Emerson Eames, a Schopenhauer enthusiast,[13] the reader recalls Chesterton's own struggle at Slade:

> For to him, and nearly all the educated youth of that epoch, the stars were cruel things...they uncovered the nakedness of nature; they were a glimpse of the iron wheels and pulleys behind the scenes. For the young men of that sad time thought that the god always comes from the machine. They did not know that in reality the machine only comes from the god. In short, they were all pessimists, and starlight was atrocious to them – atrocious because it was true. All their universe was black with white spots.[14]

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[9] Francis J. Klauder, *A Philosophy Rooted in Love: The Dominant Themes in the Perennial Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), p. 10.

[10] Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 177. In his discussion of Chesterton's philosophy, Quentin Lauer tells us: "It would seem that the best way to characterize G.K. Chesterton's thought is to recognise it as pre-eminently 'common sense,' which he himself calls 'that instinct for the probable'..." in Quentin Lauer, *G.K. Chesterton: Philosopher without Portfolio* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), p. 11.

[11] Klauder, *A Philosophy Rooted in Love*, p. 9.

[12] Thomas C. Peters, *Battling for the Modern Mind: A Beginner's Chesterton* (St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994), p. 29.

[13] For a more detailed look at Chesterton's reading of Schopenhauer, see my comments in chapter six.

[14] Chesterton, *Manalive*, (1912; repr. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1947), p. 105.

Innocent Smith decides to confront Dr Eames for a final showdown, "because I am coming to the conclusion that existence is really too rotten."[15] Dr Eames' response is extremely bleak: "...the vulgar people want to enjoy life just as they want to enjoy gin – because they are too stupid to see that they are paying too big a price for it. That they never find happiness – that they don't even know how to look for it – is proved by the paralysing clumsiness and ugliness of everything they do. Their discordant colours are cries of pain."[16] Yet when Innocent Smith threatens Dr Eames with death, the professor soon changes his mind as to the value of existence. He cannot live with the logical conclusion of his professed pessimism.[17]

Chesterton's use of colour as a metaphor for the pain of humanity is interesting. In chapter two, I noted Chesterton's symbolic use of colour in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. However, the symbolic use of colour is not peculiar to that book. Chesterton regularly used colours to indicate the general mood or happiness of the characters within his tales. The brighter and more varied the colours, the greater the level of happiness and hope. This idea is verbalised in Chesterton's introduction to Samuel Johnson's, *The History of Rasselas*. Discussing the eighteenth century, Chesterton declared: "...some of its very greatest men, like Johnson and even Swift, were profoundly religious. But their religion had not enough positive colour and therefore not enough positive joy..."[18] Chesterton also observed the lack of colour in the work of many modernists:

> Just before the war all the arts and philosophies were fading into a sort of featureless fog owing to this ceaseless multiplication of mere innovation without definition...The artist had lost his original claim on our revolutionary sympathy, as well as losing many other things, such as his time, his humility

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[15] *Ibid.* p. 106. An earlier version of this incident can be found in "The Man With Two Legs", a story that Chesterton wrote during the 1890's. See G.K. Chesterton, *Collected Works Volume 14: Short Stories, Fairy Tales, Mystery Stories* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[17] In *Manalive*, Chesterton makes it clear that this intuition of the value of existence is not to be confused with Schopenhauer's idea of the will to live (p. 113). People's inability to live with the logical conclusion of their beliefs is a theme that Chesterton returns to throughout his fiction. One particularly chilling example can be found in "When Doctors Agree" in G.K. Chesterton, *The Paradoxes of Mr Pond* (1937).

[18] G.K. Chesterton "Introduction" to Dr. Johnson, *The History of Rasselas* (Repr. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1926), p. x.

> and his sense of humour; but perhaps his most appalling loss is that he has lost his original realisation of the existence of red and green.[19]

The recognition that existence is essentially good is the "impossible good news"[20] with which Syme emerges from the nightmare in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. In *Manalive*, the transition from pessimism to optimism is symbolised by a change in colour. The colours become brighter as the characters begin to discover the joy and wonder of life. One example occurs when Innocent Smith and Dr Eames reject their pessimism in favour of a new hope in the meaning of life:

> As he [Smith] spoke the sun rose. It seemed to put colour into everything, with the rapidity of a lightning artist. A fleet of little clouds sailing across the sky changed from pigeon-grey to pink. All over the little academic town the tops of different buildings took on different tints: here the sun would pick out the green enamel on a pinnacle, there the scarlet tiles of a villa; here the copper ornament on some artistic shop, and there the sea-blue slates of some old and steep church roof. All these coloured crests seemed to have something oddly individual and significant about them…[21]

A few pages later, Innocent Smith reminds Dr Eames of the transformation that he has undergone: "What you knew when you sat on that damned gargoyle was that the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place; I know it, because I knew it at the same minute. I saw the grey clouds turn pink…"[22]

Chesterton's intuitive recognition of the goodness of existence enters into a long philosophical tradition that involves Aquinas.[23] As Leo Elders explains: "The concept of ontological goodness goes back to Plato and Aristotle." [24] The idea that being and

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[19] G.K. Chesterton, *The Coloured Lands* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938), p. 14. (Quoted by Maisie Ward in her introduction to this book.)

[20] G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908; repr. Oxford: World's Classics, 1996), p. 163.

[21] Chesterton, *Manalive*, pp. 109-10.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 113.

[23] For an interesting collection of essays that examine various philosophical positions within this tradition, see Scott MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[24] Leo J. Elders, *The Metaphysics of Being of St Thomas Aquinas: in a Historical Perspective* (Trans. Dr John Dudley, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), p. 113.

goodness are necessarily connected is a view that the early church embraced: "From the early beginnings of Church Christian thinkers held without hesitation that everything that exists is good."[25] Christianity argues that all things are created by God, who is good. It is only one small step to the conclusion that, in view of this, existence itself must be good. This is the same reasoning that led to the description of evil as a privation.

The fact that existence can be assumed, and that it is essentially good, leads one to a embrace an optimistic view of life. This is presumably what Gary Wills means when he tells us that, "...Chesterton saw, from an independent standpoint, the existential core of Thomas' thought..."[26] If existence is fundamentally a good thing, then we have something to be grateful for. This sense of gratitude should thus pervade every aspect of our lives. Chesterton talked about this philosophy of life as involving a "minimum of gratitude".[27] A number of critics have commented upon this, including Montague Brown: "In all of Chesterton's writing, there is a spirit of surprise and admiration and especially of grateful thanksgiving for the divine gift of existence..."[28]

If we have something to be grateful for, then it follows that we should have someone to whom we can direct our gratitude. Aidan Nichols suggests that this constitutes a novel argument for the existence of God: "According to Chesterton, joy as a response to being is the principal signal of transcendence which human experience offers, the most persistent and eloquent of what the sociologist of religion, Peter Berger, has called 'rumours of angels'."[29] This argument is a variation on the arguments from causality that Aquinas offers among his Five Ways for defending the rationality of belief in the

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 116. Elders gives further details in his book, with examples from Origen to Albert the Great (pp. 116-8). Scott MacDonald makes a similar observation in his introductory chapter to MacDonald, ed., *Being and Goodness*, pp. 1-2.

[26] Gary Wills, *Chesterton: Man and Mask* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 169.

[27] Chesterton, *Autobiography*, p. 91.

[28] Montague Brown, "The Philosophical Centre of Chesterton's Orthodoxy", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 14 No. 2 (May 1988), p. 219.

[29] Aidan Nichols, "G.K. Chesterton's Argument for The Existence of God", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 12 No. 1 (February 1986), p. 63.

existence of God.[30] Chesterton implicitly acknowledges this connection in his book on Aquinas when he discusses Aquinas' philosophy of Being: "Looking at Being as it is now, as the baby looks at the grass, we see a second thing about it: in quite popular language, it *looks* secondary and dependent. Existence exists; but it is not sufficiently self-existent; and would never become so merely by going on existing."[31]

According to Chesterton, existence also provides the rationale for knowledge. Rather than ignoring the intellect, his optimism became the basis for all intellectual thought: "[Chesterton's] sense of wonder about nature has, above all, to do with his habitual quest not to gape at, or to have, soothing feelings about the world, but rather to understand it. Wonder to him is not solely a feeling or a passion, an emotional shock of recognition before the world; but it is also a means to knowledge."[32]

Remembering The Value Of Existence

The doctrine of privation enabled Chesterton to combine his belief in the goodness of existence with a recognition of the reality of evil. This is how he explained his optimism: "What I meant was that our attitude towards existence, if we have suffered deprivation, must always be conditioned by the fact that deprivation implies that existence has given us something of immense value. To say that we have lost in the lottery of existence is to say that we have gained: for existence gives us our money beforehand."[33] This argument is vital if we are to understand correctly the way in which Chesterton reconciled his optimistic outlook with the evil that he found in the world. He did not deny the reality of evil and suffering in the world. He merely pointed out that such events were parasitic on the essential goodness of existence. This is the

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[30] See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 2, Article 3 (Vol. 1, Trans. English Dominican Fathers, London: Burns & Oates, 1947), pp. 13-4.

[31] Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas*, p. 206.

[32] Richard Harp, "Orthodox Wonder", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 17 No. 1 (February 1991), p. 34. Harp goes on to note that this understanding of the subject is an old one: "Aristotle had stated in the *Metaphysics*, for example, that 'it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophise.'" (p. 34.)

[33] G.K. Chesterton, "The Philosophy of Gratitude" (1903; repr. *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 14 No. 2, May 1988), p. 177.

realisation that Innocent Smith comes to: "Vomiting as he was with revulsion from the pessimism that had quailed under his pistol, he made himself a kind of fanatic of the joy of life...Though not an optimist in the absurd sense of maintaining that life is all beer and skittles, he did really seem to maintain that beer and skittles are the most serious part of it."[34] It is the same argument that Chesterton offers us in the closing pages of *Orthodoxy*: "Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial."[35]

In *The Centre of Hilarity*, Michael Mason makes a similar case for understanding Chesterton's optimism in this manner. He writes: "Yet his most violent shudder at that privation of being which is evil, is always contained within his amazement that there should marvellously be anything in existence at all, in the first place, to be deficient in being, in the second."[36] Mason continues with this line of thought later on in his book: "That it is good to be is the primary truth; the other must be reconciled with it as best we may. You can exist without suffering, but you cannot suffer without existing; being is primary, suffering is secondary, and it is good to be."[37]

Chesterton's realisation of the necessity of locating evil within this particular context, did not mean that he ignored it altogether in his fiction. This is a point that I highlighted in chapter two when I looked at the way in which Chesterton departed from Samuel Johnson's position regarding the depiction of evil in literature. It also explains why Chesterton was keen to reject the optimism of contemporaries such as H. G. Wells. Chesterton complained of Wells that: "In his new Utopia he says, for instance, that a chief point of the Utopia will be a disbelief in original sin...the weakness of all Utopias is this, they take the greatest difficulty of man and assume it to be overcome..."[38]

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[34] Chesterton, *Manalive*, pp. 141-2.

[35] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1927), p. 294.

[36] Mason, *The Centre of Hilarity*, p. 177.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 221.

[38] G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (1905; repr. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1928), p. 73.

Although Chesterton was acutely aware of the brokeness of this world,[39] he continued to emphasise the doctrine of creation.[40] He did so because he believed that a reflection of the original creation could still be seen in this world. This is precisely the theological position that Olive Ashley explains to Rosamund Severne in *The Return of Don Quixote*: "You must think me mad to be talking so when you suffer; but it's as if I were bursting with news – with something bigger than all the universe of sorrow. Rosamund, there really is joy. Not rejoicing, but joy; not rejoicing at this or that; but the thing itself we only see reflected in mirrors – which sometimes break."[41]

The parasitic nature of evil meant that it constantly threatened to blot out the goodness of existence. An example of this are instances of horrendous evil,[42] in which the suffering is so great, that it distorts our perception of the world and causes us to doubt the essential goodness of existence. Such instances are quite rare within Chesterton's fiction, leading some critics to conclude that his appreciation of suffering is limited. One of the reasons that we do not find this level of suffering in Chesterton's fiction is that his portrayal of character is relatively superficial. Detailed suffering requires a depth of character to express it, and this is missing from Chesterton's work. As we noted in chapter two, Chesterton's characters were symbols that he was not interested in developing to any significant degree.

The other reason that dramatic instances of suffering are absent from Chesterton's fiction is that he was more concerned with everyday situations, in which, people that had grown weary of existence, allowed relatively minor evils to dominate their outlook on life. Dr Herbert Warner typifies this danger. He is shown to have become so weary of existence, that he unable to rediscover an appreciation of it. Towards the end of

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[39] See chapters seven and eight.

[40] In his introduction to *The Defendant*, Chesterton went as far as declaring: "Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed." G.K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (1901; repr. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1918), p. 13.

[41] G.K. Chesterton, *The Return of Don Quixote* (1927; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1963), pp. 213-4.

[42] The term 'horrendous evil' is defined by Marilyn McCord Adams as referring to, "evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason prima facie to doubt whether one's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole." See Marilyn McCord Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God" in Marilyn McCord Adams & Robert Merrihew Adams, ed., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 211.

Manalive, he declares: "Among the hundred flowers of futility on both sides I was unable to detect any sort of reason why a lunatic should be allowed to shoot me in the back garden."[43] For Dr Warner, evil has become primary, and existence secondary. Michael Moon reflects: "We have been sitting with a ghost. Dr Herbert Warner died years ago."[44]

It is in an attempt to maintain his appreciation of existence that Innocent Smith acts in the way that he does. Michael Moon explains: "His principle can be quite simply stated: he refuses to die while he is still alive. He seeks to remind himself, by every electric shock to the intellect, that he is still a man alive, walking on two legs about the world."[45] This is why Innocent Smith travels all the way around the world – so that he can return home and appreciate his family. It also explains his willingness to enter his house like a burglar - so that he learns only to covet his own possessions. Innocent Smith describes his philosophy of life in the following terms: "I am always trying to forget what I know – and to find out what I don't know."[46]

Innocent Smith constantly tries to view existence from a new perspective. This is the explanation that he offers for arriving into his house via the chimney: "To enter a modern interior at so strange an angle, by so forgotten a door, was an epoch in one's psychology. It was like having found a fourth dimension."[47] Innocent Smith's comment can also be read as a description of Chesterton's fantastic literature in general.[48] The door (or chimney) symbolises entry into Chesterton's fantastic world. There is an interesting parallel here with *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), which begins with a chapter entitled "Story of the Door". In Stevenson's novella, the door acts as the point of entry into a fantastic world which, as with Chesterton, is located firmly in this world. Chesterton thought that one of the roles of the writer was to provide 'doors' for his readers. As Innocent Smith declares: "I don't deny that there

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[43] Chesterton, *Manalive*, p. 188.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 137.

[48] See my discussion of the nature of Chesterton's fantastic literature in chapters four and five.

should be priests to remind men that they will one day die. I only say that at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priests, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet."[49]

Chesterton thought it important to remember the value of existence by seeing the full array of colours within it. Once again, this can be illustrated through the character of Innocent Smith. When his wife pretends to be different women to help them maintain a sense of romance, the names that she takes on are all different colours.[50] Not only does Innocent Smith experience a variety of colour in women; he also experiences the same in his wine collection. This is the observation made by Arthur Inglewood: "It was only then that he observed that all six bottles had those metallic seals of various tints, and seemed to have been chosen solely because they gave the three primary and three secondary colours: red, blue, and yellow; green, violet, and orange."[51] Innocent Smith's arrival at Beacon House helps its inhabitants to see things in all their colour: "The colossal clearance which the wind had made of that cloudy sky grew clearer and clearer; chamber within chamber seemed to open in heaven. One felt one might at last find something lighter than light. In the fullness of this silent effulgence all things collected their colours again: the grey trunks turned silver, and the drab gravel gold."[52]

The idea that colours symbolise the richness of existence is made explicit in Chesterton's short story, "The Coloured Lands". At the beginning of the story, Tommy is bored with the world in which he lives. By the time the man with the coloured spectacles has finished showing Tommy other possible worlds, without the full range of colours, Tommy comes to appreciate the value of this world. The story concludes: "...Tommy remained staring at the cottage, with a new look in his eyes."[53]

Chesterton constantly reminds us that regaining wonder does not entail discovering new things in the world. To appreciate existence, we must rediscover what is already

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[49] Chesterton, *Manalive*, p. 142.

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 184.

[51] *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[53] Chesterton, "The Coloured Lands", *The Coloured Lands*, p. 30.

there. This is the point that we saw illustrated in "The Coloured Lands". Tommy begins to appreciate existence when he sees the *same* cottage in a *new* way. Chesterton argues that the cause of our weariness with existence lies with us rather than the world. Innocent Smith explains: "It was not the house that grew dull, but I that grew dull in it."[54] As we saw in chapter six, this was the point on which Chesterton differed from the Decadents. Chesterton saw that an eternal search for new things would eventually become dull: "It is of the new things that men tire – of fashions and proposals and improvements and change. It is the old things that startle and intoxicate. It is the old things that are young…There is no worshipper of change who does not feel upon his neck the vast weight of the weariness of the universe. But we who do the old things are fed by nature with a perpetual infancy."[55] In *Manalive*, Michael Moon observes the way in which Innocent Smith derives his excitement from the ordinary and common place rather than the new and sensational: "I have a fancy there's some method in his madness. It looks as if he could turn into a sort of wonderland any minute by taking one step out of the plain road. Who would have thought of that trapdoor? Who would have thought that this cursed colonial claret could taste quite nice among the chimney-pots? Perhaps that is the real key of fairyland."[56]

It might be instructive at this point to draw a comparison between Chesterton and the existentialists.[57] Innocent Smith's desire to, "remind himself, by every electric shock to the intellect, that he is still a man alive,"[58] has a certain similarity to Dostoevsky's underground man, a precursor of existentialism: "…it seems to me that the whole business of humanity consists solely in this – that a man should constantly prove to

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[54] Chesterton, *Manalive*, p. 155.

[55] G.K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 153.

[56] Chesterton, *Manalive*., p. 33.

[57] Obviously a range of different thinkers are included under the umbrella of existentialism (e.g. Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre and Camus). In drawing this parallel, I am not suggesting that Chesterton was directly influenced by these writers, as they generally follow Chesterton rather than preceding him. Although Kierkegaard's writings are earlier, they were not translated into English until after Chesterton's death. For a more detailed analysis of the development of existentialism in the twentieth century, see William McBride, ed., *The Development and Meaning of Twentieth-Century Existentialism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).

[58] Chesterton, *Manalive*, pp. 184-5.

himself that he is a man and not a sprig in a barrel-organ!"[59] While a comparison can be made between Chesterton and the existentialists, it would be wrong to locate Chesterton within the existential tradition. (This is the mistake that Michael Mason makes in his otherwise fascinating discussion of Chesterton's use of laughter.[60]) The existentialists rejected the metaphysical enterprise. This is in contradistinction to the metaphysical foundation underlying Innocent Smith's actions: "His eccentricities sprang from a static fact of faith, in itself mystical, and even childlike and Christian."[61] Existentialism begins with nothing and seeks to authenticate our existence, whereas Innocent Smith begins with a belief in the value of existence and simply tries to recall this belief throughout his life. John Macquarrie is quick to remind us of this crucial distinction: "…we should be careful not to be misled by the very different way in which existence is understood by Thomism and by modern existentialism."[62]

Conclusion

In *Manalive*, Michael Moon offers us his own thoughts on the joy of Innocent Smith: "Speaking singly, I feel as if man were tied to tragedy, and there was no way out of the trap of old age and doubt. But if there is a way out, then, by Christ and St Patrick, this is the way out. If one could keep as happy as a child…it would be by being as innocent as a child…"[63] The value of childhood is a recurring theme in Chesterton's writings, and a fitting one with which to conclude this thesis. When Chesterton talks about the innocence of childhood, he uses the word symbolically; he does not think that they are literally without fault.[64] For Chesterton, the innocence of childhood entails an ability to appreciate our existence, and be grateful for it: "Sheer wondering joy before the face of existence is claimed by Chesterton in the *Autobiography* as a characteristic feature of

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[59] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground* (1864; trans. Jessie Coulson, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 38.

[60] Mason, *The Centre of Hilarity*. Mason's existential reading of Chesterton is particularly evident in "Chapter 6: Joy at War".

[61] Chesterton, *Manalive*, p. 142.

[62] John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 48.

[63] Chesterton, *Manalive*, p. 187.

[64] In chapter seven we saw that Chesterton firmly believed in original sin.

childhood."[65] This is the same idea that Gabriel Gale articulates in *The Poet and the Lunatics*: "Man is a creature; all his happiness consists in being a creature: or, as the Great Voice commanded us, in becoming a child. All his fun is in having a gift or present; which the child, with profound understanding, values because it is a 'surprise'. But surprise implies that a thing comes from outside ourselves; and gratitude that it comes from someone other than ourselves."[66]

During this thesis I have examined Chesterton's concept of evil, and shown how he understood it to be a very real problem. At the same time, it is a problem that he wanted us to put into perspective. This is something that he believed the child did through fairy tales.[67] One feature of fairy tales is that even the most evil characters are eventually defeated. This idea was explored in chapters seven and eight when I looked Chesterton's understanding of the life and death of Jesus as a solution to suffering. Another feature of fairy tales is that they view existence positively, and it this that I have focussed upon in this concluding chapter. Chesterton believed that the evil in the world was subordinate to the goodness of existence in general: "The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale. The test of all happiness is gratitude..."[68] It is this essential goodness that outweighs the evil we find in the world, and explains Chesterton's optimistic outlook:

> The world is hot and cruel,
> We are weary of heart and hand,
> But the world is more full of glory
> Than you can understand.[69]

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[65] Nichols, "G.K. Chesterton's Argument for The Existence of God", *The Chesterton Review*, p. 64.

[66] G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929; repr. London; Darwen Finlayson Ltd. 1962), p. 91.

[67] See my discussion of Chesterton and fairy tales in chapter five.

[68] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 96.

[69] G.K. Chesterton, "The Mortal Answers" in *Collected Works Volume 10: Collected Poetry Part 1* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), p. 239.

Appendix: Chesterton's Treatment of the Cross

In his seminal work, *The Crucified God* (1974), Jürgen Moltmann wrote: "The death of Jesus on the cross is the *centre* of all Christian theology. It is not the only theme of theology, but it is in effect the entry to its problems and answers on earth. All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ."[1] If this is so, and Chesterton is seen as a fundamentally orthodox Christian, the criticism could be levelled at my thesis that I have failed to do justice to this profound soteriological strain in his thought. In chapter eight, for example, I argued that Chesterton's treatment of the cross was not prominent in his work, and, in particular, I made the suggestion that Chesterton's soteriology could be considered inadequate. I based this conclusion not on the assumption that he did not believe in the power of the cross, but rather that he rarely chose to discuss the matter explicitly in his writings. The aim of this appendix is to consider this issue further with special reference to two novels: *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*.

However, before I make my apology for treating Chesterton's theology in the way that I have, it should be noted that there is a distinction between Protestant and Catholic theology on precisely this issue. In Lutheranism especially, but also in certain types of evangelical theology, the cross is seen not only as the fundamental revelation of God in creation, but also the source and explanation of the whole scheme of Christian theology. It is there that evil is unmasked and defeated. On the other hand, in classical Catholic theology, the crucifixion and its salvific content takes its place in a constellation of doctrine: Creation, the Incarnation, the Church, and the sacraments. It is from this latter tradition that Chesterton seems to be writing and expounding his theory of evil.

In chapter three of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Adam Wayne and Auberon Quin reveal themselves as the fanatic and the humorist while discussing Quin's Charter of

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[1] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 204.

the Cities. When Quin tries to explain that it was all a joke, Wayne replies: "I suppose you fancy crucifixion was a serious affair?" Quin concurs, but Wayne contradicts him:

> 'Then you are wrong,' said Wayne, with incredible violence. 'Crucifixion is comic. It is exquisitely diverting. It was an absurd and obscene kind of impaling reserved for people who were made to be laughed at – for slaves and provincials – for dentists and small tradesmen, as you would say. I have seen the grotesque gallows-shape, which the little Roman gutter-boys scribbled on walls as a vulgar joke, blazing on the pinnacles of the temples of the world...
> ...This laughter with which men tyrannize is not the great power you think. Peter was crucified, and crucified head downwards. What could be funnier than the idea of a respectable old Apostle upside down? What could be more in the style of your modern humour? But what was the good of it?[2]

At first it is tempting to see Wayne's description of the grotesque nature of crucifixion as a reference to the way in which the grotesque seeks to subvert terror with comedy.[3] This might lead us to conclude that Chesterton uses the cross to symbolise God's ultimate subversion of evil through comedy. However, this is not the main thrust of Wayne's argument. Instead, he is putting forward the position that however strange processes within creation may seem, they nonetheless serve to induce in us a wonder at creation: "These little gardens where we told our loves. These streets where we brought out our dead. Why should they be commonplace? Why should they be absurd?"[4] Hence the distinction between the strange and the deformed that I outlined in chapter four is apposite. The grotesque that is being referred to is not the deformed but the strange. Thus the crucifixion becomes an instance of strangeness rather than a manifestation of deformity, and strangeness itself is seen by Chesterton as part of the created order.[5] Indeed, the wonder at creation in all its variety becomes increasingly central as the story unfolds. When Quin considers the possibility that the universe might be some perverse joke on the part of God, in the same way that the Charter of the Cities was a joke on his part, Wayne replies: "Suppose I do not laugh back at you, do not blaspheme you, do not curse you. But suppose, standing up straight under the sky, with every

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[2] G.K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 62.

[3] See my discussion of this on pp. 65-7 & 83-7.

[4] Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, p. 62.

[5] See my discussion of this on pp. 77-82.

power of my being, I thank you for the fool's paradise you have made."[6] He affirms the doctrine of creation by declaring that Notting Hill is good merely by virtue of its existence: "There has never been anything in the world absolutely like Notting Hill. There will never be anything quite like it to the crack of doom. I cannot believe anything but that God loved it as He must surely love anything that is itself and unreplaceable."[7]

The way in which Chesterton talks about the cross in terms of the doctrine of creation can be seen elsewhere in his writings. In *The Everlasting Man*, he discusses the meaning of the cross by way of its design, distinguishing it from not only the cyclical wheel of Eastern religions, but also the Hegelian idealism of his own day:

> The cross has become something more than a historical memory: it does convey, almost as by a mathematical diagram, the truth about the real point at issue; the idea of a conflict stretching outwards into eternity. It is true, and even tautological, to say that the cross is the crux of the whole matter.
> In other words the cross, in fact as well as figure, does really stand for the idea of breaking out of the circle that is everything and nothing. It does escape from the circular argument by which everything begins and ends in the mind.[8]

Here he uses the cross to illuminate his assertion of the reality and value of the material world rather than as the isolated instrument of salvation.

In *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, there appears the suggestion at one point that God is to be seen as one who suffers.[9] This raises the question of whether we should locate Chesterton's understanding of the cross in this context. The question of

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[6] Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, p. 155.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5.

[8] G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (1925; repr. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 134. This debate between the cross and the circle – symbolising two different philosophies of history – mirrors the debate between Michael and Lucifer in the opening chapter of Chesterton's novel, *The Ball and the Cross*.

[9] The concept that God suffers leans toward two alternative theodicies to the one that I discuss in chapters seven and eight. John Hick's reworking of Iranaeus' soul making theodicy involves the necessity of suffering for the development of character. This has obvious implications for the nature of God. To some degree, these have been explored in the process theodicies of thinkers like David Ray Griffin. (See Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, 1976.) Process theologians talk about God in terms of *becoming* rather than *being*. By describing a God who changes in response to his creation, they have an inherent obligation to discuss God in terms of a suffering God.

the passibility of God has been an area of theological controversy in the Christian church from the earliest times.[10] In his recent book, Paul Fiddes asserts the intrinsic link between the two subjects: "Above all God uses the death of Jesus Christ to define himself. As [Wolfhart] Pannenberg declares, 'If God is revealed through Jesus Christ, then who or what God is becomes defined only through the Christ event', and God reveals himself fully as self-giving love in the cross."[11]

In chapter eight of my thesis, I argued that the character of Sunday, in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, was too ambiguous to represent the Christian God. Chesterton himself declared that he had never intended to suggest that Sunday was the Christian God:

> I have often been asked what I meant by the monstrous pantomime ogre who was called Sunday in that story; and some have suggested, in one sense not untruly, that he was meant for a blasphemous version of the Creator. But the point is that the whole story is a nightmare of things, not as they are, but as they seemed to the young half-pessimist of the '90s; and the ogre who appears brutal but is also cryptically benevolent is not so much God, in the sense of religion or irreligion, but rather Nature as it appears to the pantheist, whose pantheism is struggling out of pessimism.[12]

However, Stephen Medcalf has argued that we should treat these comments with caution. He claims that describing Sunday in terms of nature "is too simple for the novel."[13] Instead, Medcalf believes that Sunday should be taken as a representation of the Christian God as depicted in both the Old and New Testament. With reference to the second of these, Medcalf focuses our attention on the final words that Sunday utters to the members of the Anarchist council: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"[14] As his argument unfolds, Medcalf suggests that not only does God suffer through the cross, but also that God may have chosen to suffer through the act of creation:

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[10] The question of God's passibility was discussed briefly on pp. 190-2.

[11] Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 265.

[12] G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936; repr. Kent: Fisher Press, 1992), p. 99.

[13] Stephen Medcalf, "Introduction" to G.K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (1908; repr. Oxford: World's Classics, 1996), p. xxvi. Medcalf outlines his position in further detail in this extended introduction to the novel.

[14] Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. 162. As Medcalf points out in his notes to the novel, this is a reference to Mark 10: 38.

"Sunday's answer to Syme makes it clear that, certainly in the Passion, possibly in the very act of creation, God knows isolation such as Gregory knows."[15]

In considering the question of whether or not God suffers, it is necessary to consider a related passage in *Orthodoxy* that touches upon the same theme:

> Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king...In this indeed I approach a matter more dark and awful than it is easy to discuss; and I apologise in advance if any of my phrases fall wrong or seem irreverent touching a matter which the greatest saints and thinkers have justly feared to approach. But in that terrific tale of the Passion there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt.[16]

This passage adds credence to Medcalf's suggestion that Chesterton believes in a suffering God, and, in turn, appears to provide a framework for understanding Chesterton's understanding of the cross. As Fiddes reminds us: "A further major reason for the theological conviction that God suffers is based on the central place of the cross of Jesus within Christian faith."[17] However, there are three reasons why I believe that this extract from *Orthodoxy* should not necessarily lead us to conclude that Chesterton believed in a suffering God. Firstly, the language of this passage is hesitant and speculative. He apologises for the "dark" suggestion that he is about to make and recognises that it may well be in conflict with the historic position of the church. Moreover, when Chesterton does articulate his position, he offers it merely as a "suggestion", fully aware of the centuries of intense debate concerning this issue. Yet to describe this idea as speculative is not to reject it out of hand, but rather it is to try to understand it within the context of Chesterton's developing theology. During this period (1908 and earlier), he was still in the process of weighing up various theological positions that fell within the general framework of Christian theology.[18]

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[15] Medcalf, "Introduction" to Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*, p. xxviii

[16] G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (1908; repr. London: The Bodley Head, 1927), p. 254.

[17] Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*, p. 25.

[18] In chapter eight, I drew a similar distinction to the one here between speculation and dogma when explaining the roles of defence and theodicy in *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*.

The second reason for doubting the suggestion that the mature Chesterton believed in a suffering God is the fact that he did not elaborate on the idea in his later writings. In response to this significant point, Denis Conlon offers the following observation concerning the identity of Sunday: "Possibly he is the God Chesterton found in the 1890s, far different from the One he worshipped at the time of his death."[19]

The third reason follows on from the second. Although Chesterton discussed the suffering of Christ in later years, he was clearly aware that this was not the same as suggesting that God had suffered. He became increasingly aware of the distinction between Christ's divine nature and his human nature. This was a distinction that some of the early-Church fathers had introduced to deal with problems caused by the suffering of Christ. It allowed theologians to argue that when Jesus suffered on the cross, it was only his human nature that suffered. As Moltmann explains: "The doctrine of two natures in christology attempted not only to make a neat separation between the natures of Godhead and manhood, but also to assert their unity in the person of Christ and to reflect upon it."[20]

In an essay found in *The Thing*, Chesterton affirmed his belief in the dual nature of Christ. He explained that "Christ, as conceived by the Catholic Church, is himself a complex and a combination, not of two unreal things, but of two real things."[21] Elsewhere, Chesterton's discussion of Aquinas contains an implicit affirmation of the dual nature of Christ. This can be found amid a discussion of the way in which Aquinas distinguished between the natural and the supernatural while affirming both: "This Christian duality had always been implicit, as in Christ's distinction between God and Caesar, or the dogmatic distinction between the nature of Christ. But St Thomas has the glory of having seized the double thread as the clue to a thousand things: and thereby

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[19] Denis Conlon, "Introduction" to G.K. Chesterton, *Collected Works Volume 6: The Man who was Thursday, The Club of Queer Trades, Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Ball and the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), p. 45.

[20] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 231. In his book, Moltmann attacks this idea of Christ's dual nature. He argues that it resulted from the patristic attempt to establish a philosophical conception of God before dealing with the life and person of Christ.

[21] G.K. Chesterton, "What We Think About", *The Thing* (1929; repr. London: Unicorn Books, 1939), p. 210. In this essay, Chesterton defends the doctrine of Christ's dual nature against those who consider it restrictive.

created the only creed in which the saints can be sane."[22] Ultimately, it is within this context that we must view Chesterton's occasional references to the suffering of Christ. Although there was a period when Chesterton contemplated the idea that the suffering of Christ involved a suffering God, he seems subsequently to have rejected this in favour of one of the patristic explanations for the dual nature of Christ. Chesterton believed he was echoing Aquinas: "According to Thomas Aquinas, too, the suffering is only a *suppositum* of the divine nature in respect of the human nature which it assumed and which was capable of suffering; it did not relate to the divine nature itself, for this was incapable of suffering."[23]

In this appendix, I have sought to elaborate on the suggestion in my thesis that the cross is relatively peripheral to the thought of Chesterton. Although references to the cross can be found in his writings, they remain scarce: "Compared to his remarks on Christmas, Chesterton's comments on Easter – the Passion and the Resurrection – occupy little space."[24] The small amount of space explicitly devoted to the cross is particularly evident in his theological works, where it receives little attention.[25] In spite of this, there were undoubtedly two areas in which Chesterton appeared to elaborate upon his understanding of the cross. The first of these involved a reference in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* to the cross in terms of the grotesque, although closer analysis showed that this was not the case and that the novel was more concerned with highlighting the wonder of creation. The second area that I considered was the idea that the cross symbolises the suffering of God, an idea that has become increasingly popular in twentieth-century theology. In particular, Stephen Medcalf has developed an interesting argument along these lines in his introduction to *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare*. Yet, although Chesterton appears to have entertained this idea quite seriously at one point, I argued that it did not make the transition from theological speculation to theological dogma in Chesterton's thought.

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[22] G.K. Chesterton, "St Thomas Aquinas", *The Spectator* (27 February 1932; repr. *The G.K. Chesterton Quarterly*, No. 2, Spring 1997), p. 2.

[23] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, p. 229.

[24] Stratford Caldecott, "Was Chesterton a Theologian?", *The Chesterton Review* Vol. 24 No. 4 (November 1998), p. 474.

[25] These include *Orthodoxy* (1908); *The Everlasting Man* (1925); *The Catholic Church and Conversion* (1927); *The Thing* (1929); *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933); and *The Well and the Shallows* (1935).

In chapter eight, I suggested that Chesterton understood the cross as essentially symbolic. This leaves us with the question of what exactly was being symbolised. It is difficult to be clear about the answer to this question as Chesterton does not provide us with sufficient detail. Ultimately, we may be forced to conclude that, for Chesterton, the cross symbolised the Christian faith in general, and the second member of the Trinity – who came to restore the fallen creation – in particular. This continuing emphasis on the doctrine of creation is relayed through an experience that Michael has in *The Ball and the Cross*: "A fierce inspiration fell on him suddenly; he would strike them where they stood with the love of God. They should not move till they saw their own sweet and startling existence…From the Cross from which he had fallen fell the shadow of its fantastic mercy…"[26]

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[26] G.K. Chesterton, *The Ball and the Cross* (1910; repr. London: Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1963), p. 22.

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This bibliography does not contain every work that I have consulted during my research: it is restricted either to works that are referred to or quoted from in the thesis, or to works that were significant in the preparation of the thesis. In the interest of simplicity and clarity I have chosen to divide the bibliography into just two sections. In the first section, it should be noted that a number of the articles by Chesterton have been collected in books (e.g. volumes of the Collected Works). Dividing his books and articles into sub-sections would be not be helpful as many of the articles that I have referred to are contained within the books listed below.

The reason for not dividing the secondary material into subject areas is that it is too eclectic to justify this sort of approach. In the course of my research, I have covered many related subjects involving different disciplines. For example, I have examined secondary material from a wide range of literary authors, as well as philosophical and theological texts. The second reason for keeping the secondary material in one section is that many of the books cover two or more subjects. As a result, dividing the secondary material by subject would not enable the reader to discover exactly what material had been used without reading through the entire bibliography.

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